

Labour flexibility:  
An analysis of the future trajectory of the employment of female graduates in  
Saudi Arabia

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## ABSTRACT

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Debates on flexible employment and labour persist in most Western market economies, while being largely absent regarding Saudi Arabia. Increasing unemployment among qualified Saudi citizens remains a major concern, particularly for females, despite a government policy of Saudisation. Notwithstanding incentives for prioritising Saudi citizens, foreign nationals dominate private sector employment. Few empirical studies consider the factors impacting employment of educated Saudi women: further, there are hardly any robust frameworks which offer policy makers, employers, and those championing the employment of this group a clear set of plausible guidelines bearing in mind the socioeconomic context of Saudi Arabia.

The research aims, first and foremost, to examine how far "labour flexibility" in Saudi Arabia offers solutions to unemployment among educated Saudi females, exploring inter-alia the main institutions and regulatory framework of the Saudi labour market, and the effectiveness of these in managing the relationship between employers and employees. It also examines the major labour market and employment policy concerns of government, employers and employees, considering flexible employment forms in Saudi Arabia, and in what context employers and employees do or would consider flexible employment. Following on from this, the second aim is to develop a conceptual framework on key factors impacting the participation of educated Saudi females in the Saudi labour market. The framework that emerges from these analyses also provides some guidance for graduate women who seek labour market entry and participation.

The study employed quantitative and qualitative methodologies, with targeted participants, returning 1347 usable questionnaires (41% response) augmented by 28 semi-structured interviews.

The quantitative data underwent statistical examination by performing descriptive and inferential analysis on the SPSS software, and qualitative data were analysed using summative content analysis. A conceptual framework was developed and validated through interviews with ten representatives of the interviewed sample population, who held senior positions. To improve understanding of key influencing factors for educated women's participation in the Saudi labour market for key stakeholders. The six factors identified were personal, socio-cultural, educational, legal/political, organisational and economic.

The study identifies a relationship between increased flexible work patterns and increased employment of educated Saudi females and suggests a relationship between the challenges Saudi females face within employment practices and numbers employed in the labour market. Similarly, a relationship exists between educational level and employment chances for Saudi women. Recommendations are proffered to the Saudi Government, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Education, industrial sector, organisations, researchers and academia.

# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Table of Contents.....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>List of Figures .....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>List of Tables.....</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>xi</b>
<b>List of Abbreviations / Acronyms.....</b>	<b>xii</b>
<b>Chapter 1 : Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Chapter Introduction.....	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	9
1.3 Key Research Questions and Hypotheses.....	13
1.3.1 Research Questions .....	13
1.3.2 Research Hypotheses .....	14
1.4 Research Aims and Objectives.....	14
1.4.1 Research Aims.....	14
1.4.2 Research Objectives .....	15
1.5 Scope of the Study and Key Assumptions .....	17
1.6 Overview of Research Process: Methodology and Methods .....	17
1.7 Significance of the Study and its Contribution .....	18
1.8 Organisation of the Thesis .....	20
<b>Chapter 2 : Background to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.....</b>	<b>23</b>
2.1 Introduction.....	23
2.1.1 Geographic Information Map of the KSA .....	26
2.1.2 The Kingdom's Modern Historical Background.....	28
2.1.3 Overview of the Saudi Arabian Culture.....	30
2.1.4 The Saudi Economy and the GCC .....	31
2.1.5 The Rules and Education System in KSA .....	33
2.2 Saudi Arabia - Employment Profiling .....	38
2.2.1 Global Female Participation in the Labour Market.....	42
2.2.2 Historical factors .....	46
2.3 The Saudisation Agenda and Labour Market Issues .....	49
2.3.1 Saudi Labour Market: demographic profile .....	58
2.3.2 Saudisation: the process of Indigenisation.....	59
2.3.3 Education Policy and Labour Markets in Saudi Arabia.....	65
2.3.4 Saudisation: addressing The Labour Market Problem .....	71
2.3.5 Challenges to Saudisation.....	77
2.3.6 Saudi Labour Market.....	81
2.4 Demographic Characteristics of the Saudi Market.....	86
2.5 Labour Market Regulations and Measurement .....	88
2.6 Summary .....	92

<b>Chapter 3 Literature Review I: Labour Markets.....</b>	<b>94</b>
3.1 Introduction .....	94
3.2 Theories of the Labour Market and links with the State .....	99
3.2.1 Classical and Neo-Classical Theory of the Labour Market .....	99
3.2.2 The Dual Labour Market .....	108
3.2.3 Institutional Theory of the Labour Market .....	114
3.3 Labour Market Types .....	116
3.3.1 External Labour Markets .....	116
3.3.2 Internal Labour Markets .....	117
3.4 Changing Labour markets.....	123
3.4.1 Globalisation and Impact on Labour Markets .....	127
3.4.2 Effects of Globalisation .....	129
3.5 Summary .....	135
<b>Chapter 4 : Labour flexibility and HRM .....</b>	<b>137</b>
4.1: Introduction.....	137
4.2 Changing Markets and Flexibility .....	139
4.2.1 Flexibility and Flexible Labour Market with Reference to Saudi Arabia .....	154
4.2.2 Labour Market Flexibility in Global Perspective .....	161
4.2.3 Labour Flexibility and the flexible firm theory .....	173
4.2.4 Forms and contexts for flexible employment .....	177
4.2.5 Advantages & Disadvantages of Flexible Employment .....	179
4.3 HRM and Labour Flexibility.....	184
4.3.1 Defining HRM: Context and Definitional Problems .....	184
4.3.2 Notion of flexibility as HRM goal .....	190
4.3.3 Internal HRM strategies and practices of firms.....	194
4.3.4 Divergence and Convergence of Labour Systems .....	207
4.3.5 Sheikh capitalism: Multinationals and Saudi Culture.....	216
4.4 Outcomes of the literature review .....	221
4.5 Summary .....	224
<b>Chapter 5 : Research Methodology and Methods .....</b>	<b>228</b>
5.1. Introduction .....	228
5.2. Research Definition and Concepts .....	228
5.3 Types of Research and their application to the current study .....	232
5.4 Research Philosophy, Methodology .....	236
5.4.1 Research Philosophy .....	236
5.4.2 Research Philosophy in the Context of the Research: Case for mixed methods .....	241
5.5 Research Approach.....	242
5.5.1 The Inductive and Qualitative Approach.....	242
5.6 Research Strategy .....	244
5.7 Ethics, Reliability and Validity .....	254
5.8 Research Methods .....	256
5.8.1 Methods of data collection.....	257
5.8.2 Methods of data analysis.....	259
5.8.3 Sampling procedures.....	260
5.8.4 Distribution and data collection.....	263
5.9: Reflection on field experience and implications for future research.....	265

5.10 Summary .....	268
<b>Chapter 6 : Findings on the Labour Market .....</b>	<b>270</b>
6.1 Introduction .....	270
6.2 Demographics .....	273
6.3 Labour Market.....	294
6.3.1 Policy.....	295
6.3.2 Expectations from the government .....	318
6.3.3 Women's pathways to finding jobs.....	344
6.4 Summary .....	358
<b>Chapter 7 : Findings on HRM and Labour flexibility.....</b>	<b>359</b>
7.1 Introduction .....	359
7.2 Preferences .....	364
7.2.1 Should firms offer flexible employment?.....	364
7.2.2 Flexible employment policies and practices.....	367
7.2.3 Flexible work for Female Graduates.....	370
7.2.4 Part-time work.....	372
7.2.5 Temporary/ short term contracts .....	375
7.2.6 Continuing prospects.....	377
7.2.7 Ownership of firm .....	379
7.3 Gender differentiation.....	401
7.3.1 Pay.....	402
7.3.2 Females Facing Prejudice at Work.....	404
7.3.3 Ease or difficulty for females to get jobs .....	406
7.3.4 Training.....	409
7.4 Disappointment .....	423
7.4.1 Female graduates as a lost resource .....	423
7.4.2 Educational choices.....	426
7.4.3 Challenges.....	428
7.5 summary.....	437
<b>Chapter 8 : Conclusion .....</b>	<b>441</b>
8.1 Introduction .....	441
8.2 Study overview .....	443
8.3 Methodological Implications .....	449
8.4 Theoretical and policy implications and contributions.....	451
8.4.1 Development of a Conceptual Framework .....	454
8.4.2 Validation of the conceptual framework.....	462
8.4.3 Summary of conceptual framework. ....	465
8.5 Study Limitations and Identification of Avenues for Future Research .....	466
<b>References .....</b>	<b>470</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>510</b>
Appendix 1: Research Permission .....	510
Appendix 2: Questionnaire .....	511
Appendix 3: Interview consent and Questions .....	519

## LIST OF FIGURES

---

FIGURE 2.1: MAP OF KSA .....	27
FIGURE 2.2: REGION OF SAUDI ARABIA .....	27
FIGURE 2.3: SAUDI FACTS AND FIGURES 2006.....	29
FIGURE 2.4: EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IN G20 COUNTRIES.....	35
FIGURE 2.5: SAUDI POPULATION BY QUALIFICATION AND GENDER .....	37
FIGURE 2.6: FEMALE TERTIARY EDUCATION ENROLMENT 1999 VS 2010 .....	38
FIGURE 2.7: UNEMPLOYMENT RATES KSA JAN 2014.....	38
FIGURE 2.8: EMPLOYMENT PROFILE OF SAUDI ARABIA.....	40
FIGURE 2.9: MALE AND FEMALE GLOBAL LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION .....	41
FIGURE 2.10: MALE AND FEMALE GLOBAL LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION.....	43
FIGURE 2.11: REGIONAL FEMALE UNEMPLOYMENT .....	43
FIGURE 2.12: LABOUR MARKET SEGMENTATION IN SAUDI .....	45
FIGURE 2.13: UNEMPLOYMENT BY AGE GROUP.....	45
FIGURE 2.14: RATES OF EMPLOYMENT IN THE ARAB WORLD .....	48
FIGURE 2.15: FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOUR MARKET BY REGION .....	54
FIGURE 2.16: UNEMPLOYMENT RATES BY GENDER IN KSA .....	55
FIGURE 2.17: PAY RATES IN PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SECTOR .....	60
FIGURE 2.18: GENDER GAP IN EMPLOYMENT IN ARAB NATIONS .....	68
FIGURE 2.19: YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT BY GENDER IN ARAB NATIONS .....	69
FIGURE 2.20: UNEMPLOYMENT RATES BY GENDER .....	70
FIGURE 2.21: UNEMPLOYMENT LEVELS BY EDUCATION LEVEL .....	71
FIGURE 2.22: LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATES.....	81
FIGURE 3.1: SUPPLY AND DEMAND RATES: WAGES VS LABOUR.....	103
FIGURE 3.2: NEED FOR LEISURE VS NEED FOR GOODS .....	104
FIGURE 3.3: LABOUR SUPPLY CURVE .....	105
FIGURE 3.4: DERIVED DEMAND FOR LABOUR.....	111
FIGURE 3.5: TOTAL SAUDI AND NON-SAUDI RESIDENTS 1974-2013 .....	131
FIGURE 3.6: IMMIGRANT WORKERS BY SECTOR .....	133
FIGURE 4.1: SECTORIAL CHANGES IN EMPLOYMENT IN THE UK.....	145
FIGURE 4.2: TEMP AGENCY EMPLOYMENT - EUROPE AND USA .....	148
FIGURE 4.3: TEMPORARY WORKERS IN THE UK.....	149
FIGURE 4.4: MALE VS FEMALE EMPLOYMENT LEVELS BY QUALIFICATION.....	156
FIGURE 4.5: FEMALES PURSUING HIGHER EDUCATION: PERCENTAGES IN SELECTED OECD NATIONS 2011 .....	187
FIGURE 4.6: PICTORIAL PRESENTATION OF THE RESEARCH STUDY'S DIRECTION.....	227
FIGURE 5.1: CONVERGENT MIXED METHOD RESEARCH STRATEGY .....	254
FIGURE 8.1: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: CHALLENGING FACTORS AFFECTING EDUCATED WOMEN'S LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOUR MARKET IN SAUDI ARABIA .....	456

# LIST OF TABLES

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TABLE 1.1 SUMMARY CORRELATION TABLE BETWEEN AIMS/OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS/HYPOTHESES .....	16
TABLE 2.1: GCC ECONOMIC INDICATORS 2008.....	32
TABLE 2.2: NITAQAT OUTPUT.....	76
TABLE 2.3: TARGET BASED ON COMPANY SIZE .....	76
TABLE 3.1: KEY CHANGES IN EMPLOYMENT BY SECTOR, OVER 25 YEARS .....	124
TABLE 3.2: GROWTH OF EMPLOYMENT THROUGH TEMP AGENCIES: EUROPE & USA 1988 & 1996.	125
TABLE 3.3: AVERAGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE EMPLOYED DAILY BY TEMP AGENCIES 1970 & 1990 ...	125
TABLE 4.1: USE OF CONTINGENT WORK IN THE UNITED STATES BY SECTOR IN PERCENTAGE .....	206
TABLE 5.1: NETWORK OF BASIC ASSUMPTIONS .....	237
TABLE 5.2: RESEARCH STRATEGIES CLASSIFICATIONS BY CONDITIONS .....	245
TABLE 5.3: RESEARCH STRATEGIES CLASSIFIED BY APPROACHES .....	246
TABLE 5.4: QUESTIONNAIRE DISTRIBUTION AND COMPLETION .....	264
TABLE 5.5: SUMMARY OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ADOPTED FOR THE STUDY .....	267
TABLE 6.2.1: PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY .....	274
TABLE 6.2.2: A LIST OF INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS.....	275
TABLE 6.2.3: AGE OF PARTICIPANTS TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY /AGGREGATE LEVEL .....	279
TABLE 6.2.4: AGE OF PARTICIPANTS TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY/ DIS-AGGREGATE LEVELS .	279
TABLE 6.2.5: LEVEL OF EDUCATION .....	280
TABLE 6.2.6: QUALIFICATIONS ACHIEVED AND IN SUBJECT AND DISCIPLINE AREAS .....	282
TABLE 6.2.7: WHERE QUALIFICATIONS WERE OBTAINED.....	283
TABLE 6.2.8: PUBLIC-PRIVATE SECTOR PARTICIPANTS.....	286
TABLE 6.2.9: NATURE OF THE WORK - FULL TIME, PART-TIME, OR FLEXIBLE WORKING PATTERN .	287
TABLE 6.2.10: SEARCHING TIME FOR A JOB .....	289
TABLE 6.2.11: NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED FOR PUBLIC SAUDI FIRMS .....	290
TABLE 6.2.12: NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED FOR PRIVATE SAUDI FIRMS .....	291
TABLE 6.2.13: NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED FOR FOREIGN FIRMS.....	292
TABLE 6.2.14: WHERE PARTICIPANTS CURRENTLY ARE EMPLOYED/HAVE WORKED IN THE PAST ..	292
TABLE 6.3.1A: FEMALE GRADUATES' CONTRIBUTION TO THE ECONOMY.....	297
TABLE 6.3.1B: KW TEST ON FEMALE GRADUATES' CONTRIBUTION TO THE ECONOMY .....	298
TABLE 6.3.2A: VIEWS ON GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO INCREASE FEMALE PARTICIPATION..	299
TABLE 6.3.2B: KW TEST ON THE VIEWS ON GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO INCREASE FEMALE PARTICIPATION .....	300
TABLE 6.3.3A: VIEWS ON ORGANISATIONS' COMMITMENT TO EMPLOY EDUCATED FEMALE .....	301
TABLE 6.3.3B: KW TEST ON VIEWS ON ORGANISATIONS' COMMITMENT TO EMPLOY EDUCATED FEMALE .....	302
TABLE 6.3.4A: FOREIGN MULTI-NATIONALS AND LIKELIHOOD OF HIRING SAUDI FEMALE GRADUATES THAN SAUDI FIRMS.....	303
TABLE 6.3.4B KW TEST ON FOREIGN MULTI-NATIONALS MORE LIKELY TO HIRE SAUDI FEMALE GRADUATES THAN SAUDI FIRMS.....	304
TABLE 6.3.5A GOVERNMENT'S INFLUENCE ON FIRMS TO EMPLOY FEMALE GRADUATES .....	319
TABLE 6.3.5B: KW TEST ON GOVERNMENT'S INFLUENCE ON FIRMS TO EMPLOY FEMALE GRADUATES.....	320
TABLE 6.3.6A: VIEWS OF PARTICIPANT ON THE MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION GUIDANCE ON FLEXIBLE WORKING PRACTICES .....	321



TABLE 6.3.6B KW TEST ON VIEWS OF PARTICIPANT ON THE MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION GUIDANCE ON FLEXIBLE WORKING PRACTICES .....	323
TABLE 6.3.7A: LABOUR AND EDUCATION MINISTRIES' INFLUENCE ON DEVELOPING MORE FLEXIBLE WORKING PRACTICES .....	324
TABLE 6.3.7B: KW TEST ON LABOUR AND EDUCATION MINISTRIES' INFLUENCE ON DEVELOPING MORE FLEXIBLE WORKING PRACTICES .....	325
TABLE 6.3.8A: VIEWS ON POTENTIAL IMPROVED INITIATIVES FOR FLEXIBLE WORKING .....	326
TABLE 6.3.8B: KW TEST ON POTENTIAL IMPROVED INITIATIVES FOR FLEXIBLE WORKING .....	327
TABLE 6.3.9A: SHORT-TERM WORK THROUGH TEMPORARY AGENCIES VS UNEMPLOYMENT .....	345
TABLE 6.3.9B KW TEST ON SHORT-TERM WORK THROUGH TEMPORARY AGENCIES INSTEAD OF UNEMPLOYMENT .....	346
TABLE 6.3.10A: JOB APPLICATIONS OUTSIDE GRADUATE STUDY AREA TO ENTER THE LABOUR MARKET .....	347
TABLE 6.3.10B: KW TEST ON JOB APPLICATIONS OUTSIDE GRADUATE STUDY AREA TO ENTER THE LABOUR MARKET .....	348
TABLE 6.3.11A: RELATION BETWEEN LEVEL OF EDUCATION AND LIKELIHOOD OF GETTING A JOB .....	349
TABLE 6.3.11B: KW TEST ON RELATION BETWEEN LEVEL OF EDUCATION AND LIKELIHOOD OF GETTING A JOB .....	350
TABLE 7.2.1A SURVEY PARTICIPANTS' OPINIONS ON FLEXIBLE WORKING PATTERNS AS A MEAN TO REMAIN IN THE LABOUR MARKET BY OFFERING THEM. ....	365
TABLE 7.2.1B: KW TEST ON FLEXIBLE WORKING PATTERNS AS A MEAN TO REMAIN IN THE LABOUR MARKET BY OFFERING THEM. ....	366
TABLE 7.2.2A: VIEWS ON RELATION BETWEEN FLEXIBILITY IN EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES AND INCREASE OF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES .....	368
TABLE 7.2.2B. KW TEST ON VIEWS ON RELATION BETWEEN FLEXIBILITY IN EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES AND INCREASE OF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES .....	369
TABLE 7.2.3A: VIEWS OF PARTICIPANTS ON FLEXIBLE WORKING PATTERNS OPPORTUNITIES .....	370
TABLE 7.2.3B: KW TEST ON VIEWS OF PARTICIPANTS ON FLEXIBLE WORKING PATTERNS OPPORTUNITIES .....	371
TABLE 7.2.4A: FIRMS SHOULD OFFER PART-TIME WORK .....	373
TABLE 7.2.4B KW TEST ON FIRMS SHOULD OFFER PART-TIME WORK .....	374
TABLE 7.2.5A: TEMPORARY AGENCIES AND SHORT TERM CONTRACTS ARE AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO ENTER THE LABOUR MARKET .....	375
TABLE 7.2.5B: KW TEST ON TEMPORARY AGENCIES / SHORT-TERM CONTRACTS ARE AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO ENTER THE LABOUR MARKET. ....	376
TABLE 7.2.6A: CONFIDENCE IN REMAINING EMPLOYED AFTER ENTERING THE LABOUR MARKET ..	377
TABLE 7.2.6B: KW TEST ON CONFIDENCE IN REMAINING EMPLOYED AFTER ENTERING THE LABOUR MARKET .....	378
TABLE 7.2.7A: PREFERENCE OF WORKING IN A FOREIGN MNC .....	379
TABLE 7.2.7B: KW TEST ON PREFERENCE OF WORKING IN A FOREIGN MNC .....	381
TABLE 7.3.1A: VIEWS ON MEN AND WOMEN PAY EQUALITY .....	402
TABLE 7.3.1B: KW TEST ON VIEWS ON MEN AND WOMEN PAY EQUALITY .....	403
TABLE 7.3.2A: VIEWS ON PREJUDICE AT WORK .....	404
TABLE 7.3.2B: KW TEST ON VIEWS ON PREJUDICE AT WORK .....	405
TABLE 7.3.3A: GENDER DISPARITIES IN GAINING EMPLOYMENT .....	407
TABLE 7.3.3B: KW TEST ON GENDER DISPARITIES IN GAINING EMPLOYMENT .....	408
TABLE 7.3.4A: GENDER DISPARITIES IN TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES .....	409
TABLE 7.3.4B: KW TEST ON GENDER DISPARITIES IN TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES .....	410
TABLE 7.4.1A: UNEMPLOYED FEMALE GRADUATES BECOME LOST RESOURCES .....	423

TABLE 7.4.1B: KW TEST ON UNEMPLOYED FEMALE GRADUATES BECOME LOST RESOURCES.....	425
TABLE 7.4.2A: DIFFICULTIES IN GAINING EMPLOYMENT CAN DISCOURAGE FEMALE TO STUDY....	426
TABLE 7.4.2B: KW TEST ON DIFFICULTIES IN GAINING EMPLOYMENT CAN DISCOURAGE FEMALE TO STUDY .....	427
TABLE 7.4.3A: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHALLENGES TO EMPLOYMENT FACED BY SAUDI FEMALE AND NUMBER GAINING EMPLOYMENT.....	429
TABLE 7.4.3B: KW TEST ON RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHALLENGES TO EMPLOYMENT FACED BY SAUDI FEMALE AND NUMBER GAINING EMPLOYMENT .....	430

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS / ACRONYMS

<b>Abbreviation /Acronym</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
ACAS	Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service
ARAMCO	Saudi Arabian Oil Company
CDSI	Central Department of Statistics and Information (KSA)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DRI	Difficulty Redundancy Index
EMU	European Monetary Union
EU	European Union
EWCO	European Working Conditions Observatory
EWI	Employing Workers Index
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GOSI	General Organization for Social Insurance
GOTEVT	General Organization for Technical Education and Vocational Training
HPWS	High-performance work systems
HR	Human Resources
HRM	Human Resources Management
HSE	Health and Safety Executives
IAC	International American Council
ILM	International Labour Market
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IR	Industrial Relations
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
MNC	Multi National Corporation/Company
MNE	Multi National Enterprise
NHS	National Health Service
NPWP	National Public Works Programme
NVET	National Vocational and Educational Training
OECD	Organisation for Economic Development
ONS	Office of National Statistics
OPEC	Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
SABB	Saudi British Bank
SABIC	Saudi Basic Industries Corporations
SAMA	Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency
STC	Saudi Telecom
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
UNPD	United Nations Program Development
USA	United States of America
WTO	World Trade Organisation



# CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION

---

## 1.1 CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

---

This chapter introduces the thesis, which considers, *inter alia*, unemployment of educated Saudi Arabia women; labour market policies in Saudi Arabia, and challenges and opportunities associated with flexible employment practices in Saudi Arabia. The chapter also makes a case for undertaking a study in this area, and posits research aims, objectives, research questions and hypotheses. The scope and key assumptions of the research are also discussed and so is its significance and contribution, which are elaborated in Section 1.7. The chapter ends by providing an overview of the research process undertaken, and also sets out the organisation and structure of the thesis.

Few would argue that the world we live in is changing, and is different from the world of two or three decades ago. We live in a world where the activities and practices in one country are increasingly informed by what is taking place globally. The last two decades have seen intensification in competitive economic and business environment. It has also been argued (Chomsky, 2012) that neo-liberalism has become the predominant economic and management philosophy for economic and business survival and competitiveness. This orientation has its most recent origins in the set of policy prescriptions known as the Washington Consensus, which was conceived as the answer to the global economic crisis of the early 1980s (Williamson, 1994). At the heart of the set of policy prescription is the idea of economic liberalisation. This idea has been operationalised in national economic policy as flexible systems including labour market flexibility (Procter and Ackroyd, 2006, 2009) and employment practices that are based on idea of flexibility as HRM goal (Guest, 1987; Atkinson, 1984).

These ideas and practices underpin management practices in almost all developed and most developing market economies as policy prescription and management strategy to address labour market constraints and ensure efficient use of labour. For example, successive UK governments, beginning with the Thatcher administration, have championed labour market flexibility as strategy to reign in Trade unions, which were considered to be the key cause of Britain's lack of economic competitiveness pre 1980s (Brown et al, 2003; Nolan and Slater, 2003; Kessler and Bayliss, 1998). Businesses, arguably, have followed this lead by adopting various forms of flexible employment and labour utilisation strategies and practices that sometimes follow Atkinson's (1984) flexible firm model.

For employers, what Nolan and Slater describe as "renewed efforts ... to achieve greater 'flexibility' in the rhythms, places and patterns of work" (Nolan and Slater, 2003, p. 58) is driven by the belief that "flexible employment practices are beneficial to both organisations, individuals and the country as a whole, because when individuals have some "control over when, where and how they work, they enjoy a better quality of life. Organisations benefit through increased productivity, lower overheads and satisfied customers" (Employers for Work-Life Balance, in Procter and Ackroyd, 2006, p. 465). Government's argument for flexible labour markets is that "a flexible labour market is one that has the ability to adjust to changing economic conditions in a way that keeps employment high, unemployment and inflation low; and ensures continuing growth in real income" (H M Treasury 2003, p. 10). Some have made arguments that suggest a link between government labour market and employment policy and relatively low levels of unemployment in the past two and half decades (for example, Taylor, 2008).

Flexibility has many aspects, including organisational structures, pay, working time and work organization (Corby & White, 2002, p17). According to Bratton & Gold (2001, p195), the ability to respond to and deal with rapid change is essential in an environment of uncertainty and even chaos. As discussed in Chapter 3, Section 2, which also discussed the competing human needs for leisure and production of goods, most organisations nowadays are trying to enhance their flexibility so as to improve productivity and profitability. In terms of HRM, flexibility comprises of three types: organisational flexibility, flexibility in job design and labour flexibility (ibid). According to Guest (1987, p514), organisational flexibility and flexibility in job design, require high organisational commitment, trust and motivation (also see Legge, 2005).

In relation to labour, the idea of flexibility in relation to HRM is consistent with the free market idea of labour market flexibility that see the role of trade unions and government intervention as being bad for performance (Legge, 2005; Practer & Ackroyd, 2006). Labour market flexibility refers not only to labour cost flexibility, but also to flexibility in labour mobility, working time and work organization, adaptability, and less strict employment protection legislation (Winer & Shibata, 2002, p208). According to Herriot (2001, p68) then, flexibility is a conscious strategy aimed at using human resources to the full so that they can add value. That means devising efficient ways of employing and using labour that reduce cost of labour and increase productivity. To achieve that objective, people like Atkinson (1984) propose four ways of labour flexibility: temporal flexibility, functional flexibility, and numerical flexibility and wage flexibility.

Temporal flexibility also referred to working time flexibility allows the organisation to vary the patterns of working time to respond to fluctuations in demand and, sometimes, needs of employee (Procter and Ackroyd, 2006, P. 9; Legge, 2005). From an employee's perspective, it gives the flexibility that allows you to be able to play other roles such as childcare, sports.



According to Herriot (2001, p66), “if temporal flexibility can meet the needs of both employer and employee, then, clearly the human resource can be considered to being used well rather than being used up”. However, as Pollert (1991) suggests, flexibility is a rather vague term and a distinction should be made between clusters of definitions and arguments about various forms in terms of their benefits to the parties (employers and employees). In that regard, Blyton and Turnbull (2004), for example, describe temporary flexibility as an internal labour market strategy which puts the burden of competitive pressure directly on employees.

Functional flexibility on the other hand, refers to a firm’s ability to deploy employees between activities and tasks to match changing workloads, production methods or technology (Legge, 2005, p178; Torrington et al., 2008). It can be advantageous for both the organization and the employee. Organizations do not have to employ new staff every time someone leaves as its staff can perform different tasks and deal with various requirements of its customers. From the employee perspective, the linking of functional flexibility with multi-skilling and job enrichment (Procter and Ackroyd, 2006 citing Employers for Work-Life Balance survey) suggests that it has a motivating effect. Functional flexibility, however, has been viewed in some very negative terms, including as being an exploitative approach to controlling the wage bill (Procter and Ackroyd, 2006; Legge, 2005). Contrary to the argument that suggests positive correlations between functional flexibility and upskilling, Legge (2005) for example refers to evidence which suggests that functional flexibility in terms of work enlargement and intensification. Thus, she argues; “there is evidence that the objective is increased management control over the deployment of labour and consequent labour intensification, with QWL outcomes secondary if not incidental” (Legge, 2005, p. 204).

Numerical flexibility concerns a firm's capacity to adjust labour inputs to fluctuations in output (Legge, 2005, p178). Hiring and firing is the most common way to achieve numerical flexibility. But today companies are adopting various other methods such as sub-contracting, outsourcing, fixed term and temporary contracts (ibid, Torrington et al., 2008). Its benefits to the employer are very obvious. However, numerical flexibility is said to give more permanent employees a sense of employment security, which they try to reinforce by willingness to acquire various skills by undertaking different projects (Herriot, 2001). Clearly, numerical flexibility in terms of varying numbers of employees in response to market demand suggests a more obvious use of flexible employment for the purpose of gaining efficiency through labour. Accordingly, this does not only mean precarious economic circumstances for those seeking full-time employment, but also implies that at any given time, employers would try to extract more productivity from fewer workers, and consequently, greater work intensification and threats of job insecurity would be created (see Legge, 2005; Blyton and Turnbull, 1992, 2004).

Wage flexibility, also known as financial flexibility refers to a firm's ability to adjust employment costs to reflect the state of supply and demand in the external labour market, in a way that is supportive of the objectives sought by functional and numerical flexibility (Legge, 2005, p178). Wage flexibility, as part of greater flexible labour strategy can according to Herriot (2001, p. 68), can be beneficial for employees because, especially in terms of the work-life balance, training and development and job variety, the more flexible rules of the employment can create possible win-win outcomes. Such arguments, however, also obscure the fact that wage flexibility has greater meaning for employers, because, for most employees, it can also have such adverse consequences as uncertainty in income and, even worse, income insecurity.

According to Atkinson (1984), it is crucial for organizations to maintain optimal balance between these categories of flexibility by segmenting the labour force into core and peripheral groups. Bratton and Gold (2000, p178 citing Atkinson, 1984) state that the flexible firm will achieve these flexibilities through a division of its workforce into a 'core' group surrounded by 'peripheral' groups.

Consistent with Atkinson's (1984) 'flexible firm model', the core group should comprise of those workers who conduct the organisation's key firm-specific continuous activities and possess high discretionary element in their work. These workers enjoy job security and also the possibility of career development in the internal labour market in return the organisation requires functional flexibility from this group of workers (Legge, 2005; Procter and Ackroyd, 2006).

Atkinson (1984) divides the peripheral group into a first and second sub-group. The first sub-group is identified as the firm's secondary labour market and comprises of workers who perform work with a low discretionary element and source for numerical flexibility. The second subgroup comprises of different types of workers providing forms of flexible employment including: part-time, temporary and casual workers, short term contracts, job sharing and trainees on government financed schemes, some of whom may be prepared for eventual transfer to the core group (see also, Bratton and Gold 2007). In addition to these, a firm's peripheral labour market can include agency workers, self-employed persons, subcontractors etc. (Atkinson, 1984).

Despite some of the advantages that flexibility is said to have, a flexible form of employment also has various disadvantages for both employers and employees. For employers, it can have disadvantages such as: increased cost, problems with scheduling and work coordination, difficulties with supervising employees and changes in organizational culture (Burke & Cooper, 2006).

For employees, flexible forms of employment are generally not seen to be secured forms of employment (Legge, 2005; Purcell and Purcell, 1996; Procter & Ackroyd, 2006). Legge (2005), for example, says there is evidence the functional flexibility tends to involve ‘job enlargement’ rather than true multiskilling and/or up-skilling. According to Legge ‘there is evidence that the objective is increase management control over the deployment of labour and consequent labour intensification, with QWL outcomes secondary if not incidental’ (2005, p. 204). For these reasons, the impact of flexible labour market and employment strategies on national economic and business performance is contested. Yet, some attribute the good economic performance of the British economy including low levels of unemployment, to flexible labour market policies and employment practices. However, whilst this may be generally so, it is not the case in every sector. Some of the hitherto productive sectors such as manufacturing have seen significant decline and, while some of that decline can be attributed to structure changes – the so-called deindustrialisation of Western economies, related flexible employment practices in terms of off-sourcing and outsourcing have been a significant factor in this decline (Ward et al., 2001).

While debates on issues of flexible employment and flexible use of labour have been constant feature in most Western market economies, they have been largely absent as they pertain to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The increasing unemployment among qualified Saudi citizens remains a major concern despite government policy of Saudisation. Despite the incentives for private sector employers to give priority to Saudi citizens, foreign nationals dominate private sector employment. Although some of this problem can be blamed on private sector employers’ hesitation to employ Saudi citizens, much of the blame can be put on the highly qualified unemployed Saudi’s refusal to be flexible in their employment seeking behaviour. It is important to explore the job seeking behaviour of qualified Saudi females in the Saudi Arabia labour market in order to assess if and how flexible employment strategies may

help address this real labour market problem. As argued in Chapter 3, Section 4, and subsection 1 regarding the failures of Saudisation, and as also evidenced in the findings, where the blame lies tend to vary depending on its source. However, the evidence tends to disproportionately focus on two factors – the reluctance of employers to hire Saudi nationals for reasons which are elaborated in Chapters 3 and 6 and, importantly, a cultural and social system that legitimises gender separation and therefore gives little or no incentive or compulsion for employers to comply with existing policy, which, for the same reasons, is also not adequately enforced by those charged with the responsibility for enforcement.

Like many GCCCs and to some extent the EU (IMF, 2013; ILO, 2010), some reform efforts have been instituted by the Saudi Arabian government in the 1990s to address employment of Saudi Arabia citizens, which included inducements to private sector companies to give priority to Saudi citizens in employment, in 2010 alone, the private sector got rid of 147,000 Saudi citizens while employing 821,000 foreign nationals (ILO, 2010). A number of reasons have been offered for this phenomenon. First, it is argued that the cost of employing Saudi citizens is considerably higher than employing foreign national. Second, most Saudi citizens do not consider private sector employment prestigious in terms of pay and conditions, which are generally much lower than public sector pay. Third, private sector employers find it easier to manage and discipline non-Saudi employees and many foreign private sector employers struggle to appropriately deal with the unique Saudi cultural and social issues (Mellahi and Wood, 2005). However, as Gonzalez et al. (2008) and Alsheikh, (2015) argue, like Saudisation, similar indigenisation approaches to labour market regulation elsewhere in the region have not had anticipated outcomes. As elaborated in Section 2.3.2, in spite of these measures, migrant labour remains an attractive proposition for employers because of its comparatively low cost, relatively higher productivity and ease of management.

A study by the Saudi American Bank (SAMBA, 2000), for example, cited unequal employment protection regulation which makes it much more difficult to discipline and/or terminate the employment Saudi nationals. Further, Alsheikh (2015) refers to the fact that public sector employment remains far more attractive to Saudi citizens for a number of reasons, including favourable terms and relative low work intensity, as explained above (Wood and Malikh, 2005).

Despite its oil wealth, like most countries, Saudi Arabia is also experiencing continuing economic and social pressures. In addition to increase international competition from increasing number of oil producing countries and increasing efforts of major oil consuming nations to reduce their dependence on oil. There increasing pressure on Saudi resources due increase youth population that is growing faster than the rate of economic growth and, also increase female labour market population. These pressures make it imperative for the Saudi government and its major public enterprises to think about alternative approaches to labour market and employment policy and strategies. It is envisaged that this study will be a contribution to that effort and the urgency of that situation makes this research undertaking both timely and essential. In addition to public policy implications, the study has potential to contribute to the very meagre literature on employment and HRM in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region.

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## 1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

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Saudi Arabia, like all countries has been impacted by the recent global economic crisis, not least in relation to employment and employment prospects for graduates. Unemployment, particularly graduate unemployment is high in the country, and the Saudi Arabia government is well aware that steps need to be taken to address this (International Labour Organisation: G20 briefs, 2010).

A major area of concern is the number of females who are reaching graduation thanks to the investment in education seen by the country in recent years. However, the findings that are presented and discussed in Chapter 7, Sections 7.4.1 through 7.4.4b strongly support the body of literature presented in Section 2.3.3 on gender inequality in the labour market and the struggles of Saudi women to gain access to the labour market and thus there is a widening gender gap in the employment market in the country (see for example; Booz and Co., 2010; ILO, 2011; Wang, 2013).

Mahdi (2007) discusses the Saudi Arabian labour market with regards to shortages, migration, and segmentation. The author outlines the fact that since the production of oil began during the 1930s the nation has needed to deal with a shortage of labour spanning both skilled and unskilled workers. To counteract the dilemma, and especially over the 1970 and the 1980s, labour-governing policies have been focused towards importing a labour supply to meet demand arising from modernisation and project work spanning both the private and the public domains of Saudi Arabia. As a significant consequence, those from overseas alongside the indigenous people have constituted the core element of the labour force for Saudi Arabia.

The Saudi state introduced an innovative employment strategy in 2009, which was duly adopted in the month of July that year (ILO, 2010). The strategy was to encompass a plan that is to span a period of twenty-five years and is partitioned according to three temporal phases; namely the short-term, medium-term and the long-term. With regards to the short-term, spanning a time period of two years the main aim advocated is to bring down the rate of unemployment for Saudi nationals via the implementation of dynamically active policy-making targeted towards lessening the nation's dependence on a non-Saudi labour force by hiring Saudi females as well as males at a pace equivalent to the amount of new job applicants/ jobseekers (ILO, 2010).

To provide some statistical data on the rather sizeable gap that is growing between Saudi male and female rates of unemployment, the female rate was more than three times greater than the rate for Saudi males spanning the time period from 2006 to 2008 (ILO, 2010). The gap grew rather significantly in 2009 to five times greater, with female unemployment rising 6 percentage points to 19%, whereas the male unemployment rate rose to a lesser extent of 0.2 percentage points to 3.7% (ILO, 2010).

A further assessment of Saudi Arabia's unemployment statistics can be made with reference to data presented by the Central Department of Statistics and Information (CDSI) of Saudi Arabia, which was reported by Aluwaisheg (2013) on behalf of 'Arab News'. Aluwaisheg (2013) states that statistics are available with reference to four core groups: (i) Saudi men, (ii) Saudi women, (iii) non-Saudi men and (iv) non-Saudi women. In tracking rates of unemployment, figures for 2012 are given on a quarterly basis. With vastly apparent deviations across the four segments, unemployment across non-Saudi men is observed to slightly fall for the first time in over a decade. Significant declines in unemployment were observed across both non-Saudi men and women. Still Saudi women have fared the worst in terms of rates of unemployment, which have continued to relentlessly rise upward in real terms.

However, to provide a more precise impression of the Saudi female's participation in the labour market, it is evident that Saudi Arabian women are now able to accept jobs that were once not accessible to them, to render a new working environment dynamic in Saudi Arabia (Abu-Nasr, 2013). Change is seemingly arising from King Abdullah's reign over the kingdom, which since his ascension to rule has been observed to gradually increase the humanitarian rights the women of Saudi Arabia are able to take advantage of, and this is in spite of the resistance faced from certain parties linked to a more religious order (Abu-Nasr, 2013).



To convey the current state of females participating in the Saudi Arabian labour market Abu-Nasr (2013) reports on how an ever-increasing segment of the Saudi population are now warming to the idea that it is acceptable for women to be employed, though particularly in occupations pertaining to legal service or real estate. The employer regime able to note the gains from the hiring of women is adapting the working environment in order to appropriately accommodate them without creating offence. For instance, employers are including washroom facilities to cater to women's needs, building in additional entry points as well as working spaces for women. These are crucial because the gender separation principle of Islam and Saudi tradition and culture prohibits most taken for granted contacts which take place between men and women who are not of the same family.

There is, however, a growing recognition that there is a looming employment problem in Saudi Arabia due to the increase in women entering the market place as a result of the changes brought about by two main factors. The first is the increasing number of females educated to a high standard, both at home and abroad, and the other is the Saudi governments focus on increasing employment opportunities for Saudi nationals, as opposed to expatriates from overseas.

These two factors have meant that the main parties in the labour market need to adjust and adapt to the potential issues in terms of recruitment, selection and opportunities that these two changes will bring. In order to clearly evaluate the whole situation, the context and theories of the labour market and the factors that influence it, both before individuals enter and after and to place the study in a global context, this chapter considers a number of areas. This necessitates the need to evaluate the labour market *per se* and the different types and theories of labour markets, including both the internal and external markets and the effect and role of the state in shaping them.

In the same vein, it is worth considering the context of the Saudi Arabian labour market and its specific institutions and the developments over the last decade and the implications of these. It is equally important for the main constructs of the internal labour market to be considered together with the impact this will have on recruitment and selection, alongside issues of state regulation, policy and cultural issues for MNCs operating in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, given the place of Saudi Arabia within the world commercial stage, an overview of current trends within the global marketplace is worthy of exploration, indicating where these trends may have a specific impact on Saudi Arabia. Given these, it is natural to venture into assessing the potential of flexible employment to deliver a viable solution to the concerns being raised regarding the Saudi Arabian employment market, and the flexibility within the labour market. This should entail a review of what flexibility in the labour market means, how it impacts on, and is influenced by HRM practices, cultural factors and overall market place situation, with a particular reference to the issues around educated Saudi Arabia women and flexible working within the Saudi market place.

There remains, therefore, a paucity of empirical studies that have considered the key challenges and factors that impact on employment of educated Saudi Women. In addition, no frameworks have been offered in this regard for the benefit of policy makers, employers, and those that champion the employment of educated Saudi Arabia women which this study will attempts to develop.

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### 1.3 KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

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#### **1.3.1 Research Questions**

1. What are the main institutions and distinct regulatory framework of the Saudi Arabia labour market, and how effective are these institutional and regulatory frameworks in terms of managing the relationship between employers and employees?

2. What are the major labour market and employment policy concerns and challenges of government, employers and employees in Saudi Arabia?
3. What is the nature of flexible forms of employment in Saudi Arabia, and in what context do or would employers and employees consider flexible employment?
4. To what extent can "labour flexibility" provide a viable solution to the problem of unemployment (rather than underemployment) among educated Saudi females?
5. If the educated Saudi Arabia women and educated women are under-represented in the labour market, how has the problem evolved, and what are its sources, causes and consequences?

### **1.3.2. Research Hypotheses**

1. There is a relationship between increased flexible work patterns and increased employment of Educated Saudi Arabia females
2. A relationship exists between the challenges Educated Saudi Arabia females face as part of employment practices and the number that actually are employed in the labour market.
3. A relationship exists between the level of education achievement by graduate women in Saudi Arabia, and the relative ease of gaining employment in the labour market.

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## **1.4 RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **1.4.1 Research Aims**

The aims of this research are two-fold:

- 1) To examine the extent to which "labour flexibility" in Saudi Arabia is able to produce a viable solution to the problem of unemployment among educated Saudi females.

- 2) To develop a conceptual framework, which *inter alia*, helps to improve awareness and understanding of the key factors which impact on educated women's level of participation in the Saudi Arabia labour market, for the benefit of key stakeholders (including policy makers, employers, academics, and employees' representatives and champions).

#### **1.4.2 Research Objectives**

1. To conduct a thorough review of literature for the purpose of assessing the extent and relevance of this to the areas of labour market and employment policy generally, and specifically to Saudi Arabia. This has facilitated the identification of a gap in theory which the current study ventures to address.
2. To critically appraise and document employment policy concerns and challenges of government, employers and employees in Saudi Arabia, related to educated women in Saudi Arabia. In this regard, the research explores the extent to which government labour market policy interventions recognise and seek to address the discrepancy between investment in female education and labour market interventions relating to female unemployment.
3. To specifically investigate and document the extent to which education, training, and key Human Resources issues impact on the employability of women in Saudi Arabia. The focus, in this regard, is to assess trends in areas of concentration in female education and employment.
4. To explore and document the nature of flexible forms of employment in Saudi Arabia, and how this is considered by employers and employees, especially in terms of the employment of educated Saudi Arabia females. The underlying assumption is that employers' conceptions and attitudes towards flexible employment practices are critical to the viability of the proposition that such

practices will provide credible solutions to unemployment among Saudi female graduates.

5. To investigate the key factors impacting on educated women's level of participation in the Saudi Arabia labour market. The development and validation of a useful conceptual framework which can be a credible point of reference for policy makers, employers and, crucially, female graduates seeking labour market entry and sustainable careers, will of necessity require careful examination of critical factors that impact the labour market positions of women in general and, particularly, women graduates.

TABLE 1.1 SUMMARY CORRELATION TABLE BETWEEN AIMS/OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS/HYPOTHESES

<b>Aims/Objectives</b>	<b>Questions</b>	<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Addressing Chapter(s)</b>
<b>Aims</b>			
Aim 1	*Question 3 *Question 4	*Hypothesis 1	Chapter 4, 6 and 7
Aim 2	*Question 1 *Question 2 *Question 5	*Hypothesis 2	Chapter 2, 3, 4 and chapter 8
<b>Objectives</b>			
Objective 1	*Question 1	*Hypothesis 1 *Hypothesis 2 *Hypothesis 3	Chapter 2, 3 and 4
Objective 2	*Question 2	*Hypothesis 2	Chapter 2, 4, 6 and 7
Objective 3	*Question 5	*Hypothesis 3	Chapter 4,6 and 7
Objective 4	*Question 3 *Question 4	*Hypothesis 1	Chapter 3, 4, 6 and 7
Objective 5	*Question 1 *Question 2 *Question 5	*Hypothesis 2 *Hypothesis 3	Chapter 2, 3, 4 and chapter 8

1. This study, whilst reflecting on employment practices in Saudi Arabia, primarily focuses on educated women.
2. It considers employment practices in both the public and private sectors, but contends that in Saudi Arabia, the public sector employs most of the workforce, including the educated women labour force.
3. It primarily focuses attention on employment in organisations which are mainly in urban cities in Saudi Arabia, as most of the employing organisations are located in urban cities in Saudi Arabia.

## 1.6 OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH PROCESS: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

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The study sets out the overall philosophical position used, which in turn informs the research methodology. The research methodology also informed the research methods or instruments used for data collection. The epistemological position (Creswell, 2014) of the study is one which leans toward positivism, whereas the ontological position is one which leans towards objectivism (Saunders et al, 2012). The axiological standpoint is one that is “value-free” as opposed to “Value-laden”.

There are two main methodological approaches to research, namely quantitative and qualitative (Cohen et al. 2002; Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002). The decision whether to choose a quantitative or a qualitative design is a philosophical one which, to some extent, can be answered by examining the research aims; by considering the type of information needed, and by assessing the various roles of the researcher and the research-participant relationship needed to successfully conduct that research, (Bryman, 2008).

It is not possible to understand human actions without first understanding the context within which subjects interpret their thoughts, feelings and actions.

So, although the quantitative method is useful in representing some aspects of human reality, it is not always possible to use statistical data to represent participants' feelings and perceptions. There is a greater risk that conclusions regarding perceptions, experience and behaviour of participants will be distorted when quantitative approaches are used (Hammersley 1983, 1992). Since the intention is not to establish cause-and-effect relationships or to develop generalizations, (Cohen et al. 2002), but rather to assess perceptions not only about existing phenomena, but also perceptions as to if and when such phenomena might be contemplated. In this study a mixed research methodological approach (Bryman, 2008) is employed, drawing on both qualitative methodology involving semi-structured interviews; and quantitative approach, using questionnaire survey to obtain important data. Interviews and questionnaires targeted senior managers, government officials responsible for employment policy and administration, as well as employees whose views on employment in general and the future trajectory of the Saudi labour market will be essential to this analysis. The study also included an analysis of secondary sources of data for the archival research dimension, to augment the collection of appropriate data needed for the study, which will be explained further in the methodology chapter. This is consistent with the mixed methods philosophical position taken by the study and rationalised in the methodology chapter.

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#### 1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY AND ITS CONTRIBUTION

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Given the paucity of empirical research in the area of employment practices targeting educated Saudi Arabia females, this study should add to the body of knowledge in this very important area of research. The development of a conceptual framework should help to improve awareness and understanding of the key factors which impact on educated women's level of participation in the Saudi Arabia labour market, for the benefit of key stakeholders, including policy makers, employers, academics, and employees' representatives and champions.

Theoretically, review of extant literature indicates some exhaustive explorations and analyses of gender relations in Saudi, but often in the context of wider cultural and social debates about gender and power in Saudi society (Boz, 2010; Ramady, 2005, 2010). Consequently, even where analyses concern employment and HRM, they tend to frame these in some rather general demographic terms, without a nuanced focus on specific gender categories (Mallihi and Wood, 2005; AlSheikh, 2015).

Yet, it would be a fatal error to ignore contemporary social developments in analysis of gender relations in Saudi Arabia and, particularly, in terms of the implications of these developments for employment and utilisation of human resources. This study is unique in the sense that, although on the face of it, it could be viewed as one of several studies concerned with gender inequality (perceived or real) in labour market access in Saudi Arabia, it departs from the generalised tendency with a focus on a specific category of gender: female graduates. In that respect, the study represents a contribution to understanding of trends in gender in relation to educational and professional attainment and, even more significantly, it represents a unique contribution as to the implications of this trend for employment and how these implications might be anticipated and addressed.

Consequently, both academics and educators are likely to benefit from the study and may be able to inculcate some of the key challenges and opportunities associated with flexible employment of educated Saudi Arabia females in appropriate academic curriculum and training courses. Up and coming researchers may benefit from the research methodological approaches employed in the study. In addition, the general approach may be employed in investigating the employment of educated women in other similar countries in similar countries to Saudi Arabia, and other countries in the Middle East.



The thesis has been organised in a logical manner in order to enable the reader to appreciate the thoughts of the author in achieving the objectives of the study. The thesis is divided into 8 chapters. Chapter 1 (the current chapter) introduces the core theoretical issues and arguments, the context, rationale for the study. It also documents the aims and objectives of the study, the key research questions and the methodology that was employed. Chapter 2 provides a background and context of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, including its political and geographical profile, economy and social structure. Very importantly, it also reviews and discusses pertinent issues around Saudisation, including a review of the literature on the most recent incarnation of the policy in the form Nitqat and the limitations of the policy in relation to female labour market access, as well as key issues pertaining to flexible employment practices.

Chapter 3 provides a critical review of the literature on the labour market and employment policy and practices generally and, drawing on some of the discussions in chapter 2, with some reference to Saudi Arabia and some consideration of some of the key issues and challenges that impact of female employment in Saudi Arabia.

Chapter 4 discusses theories and debates regarding flexibility in an international context, focusing on different regional environments before focusing on issues of flexibility in the Saudi Arabian context. The chapter then reviews theory about flexibility as applied to HRM. In that regard, flexibility is discussed as an aspect of the internal strategy of firms, in relation to the role of MNCs in Saudi Arabia and, therefore, with reference to the notion of *Sheikh Capitalism, Multinationals and Saudi Culture*.

Chapter 5 discusses the research methodology covering issues of epistemology, research design and data collection exercise and, in light of the issues of research and the research context, makes a case for a mixed methods approach.

The discussions outlined the problems encountered during the fieldwork and their implications for the validity of the findings and conclusions. Chapter 5 describes the findings from the fieldwork including interview and survey data as well as information collected from review of official documents. Chapters 6 and 7 cover the empirical aspects of the research. Chapter 6 focuses on findings in relation to the labour market. Accordingly, in addition to presenting a demographic and organisational profile of the research participants and the organisations which are targeted, the chapter documents and critically discusses the findings in relation to labour market policy and views on women's labour market entry and job seeking strategies and behaviour.

The essential conclusions that are drawn from these discussions are; firstly, although the policy interventions of the government are recognised to be positive efforts, they are also considered to be fundamentally limited due to limited compliance and lack of enforcement. Secondly, bearing in mind the focus on flexibility as a labour market entry strategy, but also the limited presence of flexible employment practices in Saudi Arabia, the findings indicate that female graduates have a clear disposition to consider the use of temporary employment agencies as a means of labour market entry.

Chapter 7 documents and discusses other critical issues, including government, employer and potential employee expectations of policy, women's preferences and employer views in terms of various modes of flexible employment, challenges that women face with respect to securing employment and perspectives on gender relations and cultural and social factors and their implications for the labour market situation of Saudi female graduates. In these regards, the findings indicate a lack of consensus as to what constitutes the various flexible forms of employment and a general view of the presence of gender inequality and cultural and social traditions which significantly constrain women's labour market access and career progress.

Finally, Chapter 8 summaries the thesis, outlines its major conclusions and presents a conceptual framework which it argues to be more consistent and reflective of how the research phenomena shows itself in the Saudi context. The chapter also highlights the limitations of the study and their implications for the conclusions that are drawn, and gives some recommendations as to potential directions which future research may take.

## CHAPTER 2 : BACKGROUND TO THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

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This chapter is primarily concerned with presenting and evaluating the literature on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) (IAC Council, 2013; Shalaby, 2008). This is important as a means of providing a backdrop and context, and for situating the study clearly. The chapter therefore, provides background information on Saudi Arabia in order to define the political, economic and sociocultural contexts that shape the labour market position of female Saudi graduates.

Accordingly, the chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section begins with an overview of the political and geographical context, which is followed by accounts of the recent history of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, its sociocultural characteristics and, discussion about the economy in the context of Saudi Arabia's membership and role in the Gulf Corporation Council (GCC). This is followed by an overview of the Education system. The second main section focuses on the Kingdom's labour market and Saudisation, a term that describes a major government intervention that aimed to indigenised the labour market. The final main section focuses on the core issue of graduated female labour market participation in Saudi Arabia.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), constitutes the largest Arab nation situated in Western Asia in terms of geographic area, amounting to somewhere in the region of 870,000 square miles (2,149,000 km<sup>2</sup>) (IAC Council, 2013). Making up most of the Arabian Peninsula, the KSA is also the second largest state in the Arab world, with Algeria being the largest (Ararat International, 2012).

The IAC Council (2013) provides some valuable statistics concerning the KSA, to include the fact that Riyadh is the capital city, and the country has, according to the World Bank, a population of nearly 29 million, with 8.5 million of these being foreign nationals. Whilst the official language of the Kingdom is Arabic, English is widely used in matters of business. In terms of political ideology, the government of the KSA is defined as Unitary Islamic with an absolute monarchy (Saudi Arabia Embassy, 2013).

Islam is the main religion in Saudi Arabia, composed of Sunni and Shi'a Muslims, with 90% being Sunni. It is also notable that the practice of other religions is forbidden and considered to be illegal in the country, although as Kechichian (2013) opined, private practice of other religions may be accepted due to the high reliance on foreign workers.

However, overt non-Islamic worship is discouraged. The country's strong stance on Islam and the significance of religion stems in part from the kingdom's socio-cultural heritage and the fact that the country is home to two of the three foremost religious shrines of Islam – the Kaaba in Mecca (Makkah), and the Al-Masjid al-Nabawi in Medina (Madinah), (Bowen, 2008; CIA World Factbook, 2013). Indeed one of the official titles of the KSA Monarch is 'Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' (CIA World Factbook, 2013); and the country is also referred to as 'the Land of the Two Holy Mosques' (Splendid Arabia, 2012). It is so named as a way of referring to 'Al-Masjid al-Haram', which is based in Mecca, and 'Al-Masjid al-Nabawi', which is based in Medina (Splendid Arabia, 2012).

These titles and descriptions highlight the importance of religion to the country and its people which, arguably, impact on decisions about human resources management and with particular relevance to this work, the role of women in society and the labour market as noted by Abukhalil (2011).

The state itself in its current form was only established in 1932 by King Abdul Aziz bin Saud (CIA World Factbook, 2013; Shalaby, 2008). Since then, in line with the country's belief in ruling through an absolute monarch, five of King Saud's sons have subsequently held the throne, taking the country through periods of growth as a result of oil wealth, dissent related to Islam extremists and the country's alliances with America. The late ruler, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, who died on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2015, and was succeeded by another of Al- Saud's sons, King Salman, has focused modernising the country and giving it a greater presence on the world stage, whilst retaining an overall focus on the Saudi identity and the historical Islamic presence and importance of the kingdom. What is important here is the integral role that the monarchy has played in the history and establishment of the KSA, including the roles of women and their participation in the labour market (Schoult, 2006).

A further factor in the current fortunes of the KSA is that it holds the second greatest global oil reserves (OPEC, 2012), surpassed only by Venezuela (Rowling, 2012). Most of these reserves are in the eastern-most region of Saudi Arabia (Ararat International, 2012). With reserves somewhere in the order of 25% of the crude oil the world over (Splendid Arabia, 2012), oil accounts for in excess of 95% of all of Saudi Arabia's exports, reaping somewhere in the region of 70% of the nation's total revenue. It also boasts reserves of natural gas, being the world's number six in reserves held (Ararat International, 2012). The result of this is that the oil reserves and accompanying revenues have transformed the nation from being a rather poorly developed desert and barren region into now what is regarded as one of the more affluent nations in the world (Ararat International, 2012; Cordesman, 2003).

Not only have the oil reserves of the country led to high levels of affluence and industrialisation across the country, they have also led to modernisation, specifically in relation to establishment of educational support and welfare systems (Ararat International,

2012; Cordesman, 2003). This modernisation programme has led to improved living conditions, greater material affluence and adoption of technology, at least amongst some levels of society (Niblock, 2013). However, this modernisation has also come with a greater influence from the west, which has created concern amongst religious leaders over the erosion of traditional values within the country from a social perspective.

This is particularly the case in relation to female participation in the labour market and the wider society, despite the retention of tight controls over female rights in the Kingdom, creating a dichotomy for women, as Al-Rasheed (2013) highlights. For example, Saudi Arabia still prohibits women from driving (McVeigh, 2012; Tomlinson, 2013; Allam, 2012). Saudi Arabia is in fact the only country in the world to prohibit women from driving, and also enforces a number of restrictions on women in terms of travel and employment (Yalibnan, 2013). These factors all have major implications for female participation in the labour market in the country, not least in terms of access to a wider selection of jobs and working locations. With this in mind, the following sub-sections present background information and overviews of the geography, socio – cultural characteristic and economy before subsequent sections focus on the labour market and consider the overall area of female participation within the Saudi labour market.

### **2.1.1 Geographic Information Map of the KSA**

Geographically, the KSA is based in the Middle East, and its total land-based borders amount to 4,431 km (CIA World Factbook, 2013). Its border nations are: Iraq (814 km), Jordan (744 km), Kuwait (222 km), Oman (676 km), Qatar (60 km), United Arab Emirates (UAE) (457 km), and Yemen (1,458 km). Moreover, with 2,640 km of coastline the KSA border the Persian Gulf as well as the Red Sea. For a depiction of the location, please see Figure 2.1.

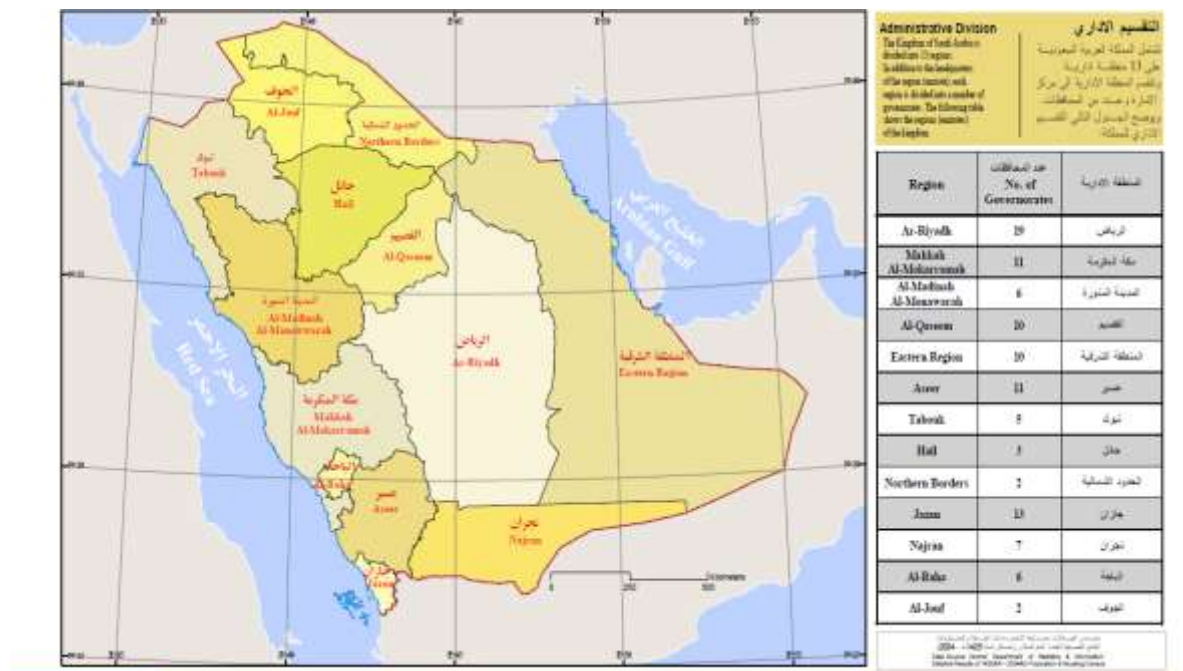
FIGURE 2.1: MAP OF KSA



Source: CIA World Factbook (2013)

The country is divided into a number of administrative regions as shown in Figure 2.2

FIGURE 2.2: REGION OF SAUDI ARABIA



Source: CDSI (2013)

Known for its rather harsh, mostly inhabitable arid desert lands, the region is also renowned for its rather extreme temperatures and heat. In geographic terms, Saudi Arabia is made up of four core regions; these are the central, eastern, western and southern regions (Splendid Arabia, 2012).



The western point of the KSA is mainly dominated by the mountainous chain spanning the complete distance of the nation corresponding to the Red Sea, rising from somewhere in the region of 1300 metres to in excess of 3000 metres. Originating from this abundant and fertile peak, the mountainous terrains drops down in the direction of the east as an arid tract, to head towards a rather dry core of the ‘Nejd’ region, which hosts the sandy desert lands of the ‘Great Nafud’, ‘Empty Quarter’ and the ‘Ad Dahna’. The easternmost province in comparison resides alongside the Persian Gulf Coast and houses mainly salt-based flats. In order to understand how the Kingdom developed and its population spread as well as some of the cultural factors which may impact on female participation in the labour market, illustrations of the changes the country has undergone in recent years are provided. The next section discusses the Kingdom’s modern historical background.

### **2.1.2 The Kingdom’s Modern Historical Background**

Shalaby (2008) recounts how the Kingdom underwent significant steps towards unification under the reign of King Abdul Aziz Al-Saud during the early 1930s. Functioning as a monarchy and as directed by Islamic law, rulings of the Kingdom are conducted in line with the conservative branch of Sunni Islam. Although decisions are made from a centralized source of power and authority, the Monarch upholds a long standing tradition of consultation with the more ‘elite’ figures of the Kingdom’s high society. For a snapshot of key statistics and figures underscoring the Kingdom refer to ‘Figure 2.3: Saudi Arabia at a Glance in 2006’.

FIGURE 2.3: SAUDI FACTS AND FIGURES 2006

Saudi Arabia General Facts and Figures	
Country Size	2,149,690 sq. Km
Population Size (2006)	23.7 million
<i>National</i>	80%
<i>Non-national</i>	20%
GDP (2006)	USD 348.6 billion
GDP PPP (2006)	USD 396.7 billion
<i>Oil and Gas</i>	48%
<i>Services and other</i>	34%
<i>Manufacturing</i>	10%
<i>Construction</i>	5%
<i>Agriculture, forestry and fishing</i>	3%
GDP per capita (2006)	USD 14,719
GDP per capita PPP (2006)	USD 16,744
Human Development Index/ HDI ranking	76/177
Religious Groups	Muslim 100% (Sunni 95% ; Shia 5%)
1 Saudi Arabia Riyal (SAR)	USD 0.25

Source: Shalaby (2008: 66).

Having presented a snapshot of the Kingdom's key statistics from only a few years ago, whilst understanding that the population is still growing and the country still expanding through its process of modernisation and Saudisation under King Abdullah, a crucial element of the country's economic stability and thus its labour market is its relationship and positioning within the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC).

The GCC is the political union of Arab states which border the Arabian Gulf and aims to regulate and support states in the region with development and economic advancement. The understanding of the Kingdom and its approaches to labour market thus comes from recognising the background and development of the country, but also requires understanding of Saudi culture. The next section, therefore, presents an overview of the Saudi Arabian Culture.

### **2.1.3 Overview of the Saudi Arabian Culture**

In light of Saudi Arabia's significance to the Islamic faith, a sense of responsibility for providing public services has been somewhat of an honour for the tribes of Mecca. In providing for the less fortunate and those in need of charity, 'Philanthropic giving' has been a significant underpinning to epitomise the unique culture of the Arab Peninsula, along with Islam organised and well thought-out aspects of philanthropic giving. "In the process, giving was placed in the context of a larger individual responsibility toward society. The region and culture that is now the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, initiated of many of the institutional forms of 'giving management', now familiar to the area" (Shalaby, 2008: 65).

Indeed, with the tribal populations merging in 1932 to strengthen the Kingdom and with the discovery of the oil reserves after 1938, the charitable wealth was channelled to reach a wide assortment of fields, and today, with government and private businesses coming together a novel premise for philanthropic giving in the area is developing. It also is creating pressure for more enabling legal environment and demands on cultural norms for higher levels of participation and civic engagement" (Shalaby, 2008: 66). According to Hofstede's cultural dimensions (1980, 2001), which provide insights into the basic facets of a nation's culture, Saudi Arabia is a country which has a strong hierarchical framework where each individual has a recognised place, and there are inherent inequalities in society, although rulers are seen as benevolent autocrats (Alkhalifa, 2010).

The country is highly masculine, and does not like uncertainty, preferring to maintain strict codes of regulated behaviour. This is illustrated by the strong Islamic focus of the country and its rules but also suggests reluctance for innovation and moving forward, for example into greater participation by females in the labour market (Al-Rasheed, 2013). It is however, also affected by the country's overall place within its main region, and its political alliances, particularly that of the GCC.

In addition, the society is highly collectivist, with strong family group ties, with loyalty to these groups overriding most regulations, responsibility for the group members is shared and there are high levels of offence taken when an individual moves away from normal behaviour. This is important in relation to female participation in the labour market as it suggests that without overall backing women who choose to enter the labour market may suffer family or group backlash for their decisions (Crawley *et al*, 2013). Having now discussed the cultural positioning of Saudi Arabia, the next section discusses the Saudi economy and GCC.

#### **2.1.4 The Saudi Economy and the GCC**

Ramady (2010) provides a useful illustration of the Saudi Arabian economy by engaging in a comparative economic analysis with the other countries in the GCC; namely, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, UAE (United Arab Emirates), and Oman. In particular, and to contextualise the analysis, he explains how spanning the past three decades the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has worked on deepening its ties with its close GCC neighbours to develop its economic, political and military alliance and coordination. In terms of the Kingdom's economic sway and performance relative to other GCC member states, please see Table 2.1 regarding GCC Economic Indicators 2008.

TABLE 2.1: GCC ECONOMIC INDICATORS 2008

	<b>Bahrain</b>	<b>Kuwait</b>	<b>Oman</b>	<b>Qatar</b>	<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	<b>UAE</b>
Nominal GDP (\$ billion)	18.5	148.8	53.1	104.6	468.8	239.5
Real GDP Growth (%)	6.1 %	6.3 %	6.2 %	16.4 %	4.4 %	7.4 %
GDP per capita (\$)	\$18,810	\$35,930	\$19,480	\$65,060	\$18,700	\$43,350
Inflation (%)	7.0 %	10.8 %	12.5 %	15.1 %	9.9 %	14.0 %
Imports (\$ billion)	14.6	26.1	16.7	21.2	100.6	116.6
Exports (\$ billion)	16.9	88.8	33.3	53.2	313.3	180.9
Current Account (\$ billion)	1.3	59.5	4.8	18.3	134.0	28.7
Government Balance (% of GDP)	2.7 %	30.8 %	4.2 %	9.6 %	33.6 %	12.2 %
Oil and Gas Reserves (Billion boe)	1.6	112.7	11.8	174.7	308.8	135.9
Oil sector (% of nominal GDP)	33 %	55.8 %	47.2 %	62.1 %	56 %	34.4 %
Net foreign assets (\$ billion)	3	295	23	100	403	272
External debt to GDP ratio (%)	157 %	25 %	16 %	87 %	23 %	76 %
Cross border foreign claims / GDP (%)	70 %	21 %	25 %	51 %	12 %	67 %
Ease of doing business (2009) [1 = best; 178 = worst]	20	61	65	39	13	33
Global competitiveness ranking	37	30	38	31	35	37
Rating (S&P)	A	AA-	A	AA-	AA-	AA

**Source: Ramady (2010)**

In recent years, the Kingdom has also endeavoured to develop its relations economically and geo-politically speaking with significant newly developing global powers; namely, India and China. At the same time, Saudi Arabia has concerned itself with maintaining amicable relationships with its trade alliances in the West, including the USA. In that regard, Saudi Arabia has recognised that maintaining its economic relationship as the basis for further and sustained economic growth, would require significant and tangible level of modernisation of Saudi society, not least in relation to education and participation of females within the labour market, but also, enabling and encouraging greater numbers of

Saudi nationals to work in order to reduce the country's reliance on foreign workers (Zuhur, 2011).

Furthermore as recent information from the Saudi Arabian Monetary agency indicates, the country is likely to be seeing growth in tourism as well as in the oil based industries, and therefore there may be potential for increasing the number of localised jobs for Saudi nationals, male and female (SAMA, 2013). With this in mind the following section considers the education system and associated rules and regulations in the Kingdom.

### **2.1.5 The Rules and Education System in KSA**

A potentially important factor in relation to participation of females in the labour market is their education and the qualifications which they can obtain. Clark (2012) reports on statistics from the 'Ministry of Economic Planning', which states that in 2010 the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was host to twenty-four public universities, forty-five technical colleges - thirty-six of which are male only institutions, coupled with nine female institutions – and in addition there are ninety-eight vocational training centres for tertiary levels of learning. For learning at the primary and secondary level, a total of 4,885 secondary school establishments, plus 7,826 intermediate school establishments and 13,626 primary school establishments are recorded.

Clark (2012) further states that spanning the entire educational system, the KSA has 5.2 million pupils who have been enrolled as students. This is broken down into 2.5 million students enrolled in primary level schooling; 2.4 million in intermediate-level schooling as well as secondary-level schooling, and nearly 900,000 pupils enrolled in higher education. An additional 78,000 pupils were enrolled at a level of higher technical training, with 16,300 pupils enrolled at vocational training centres.

These figures suggest that there has been major investment in education as the country has modernised, but the male/female divide further underlines the focus on ensuring retention of culture values.

The investment in education derives from KSA policy in line with Islamic values and economic freedom, whereby the advancement of human resources and assets is being strategically managed (Ministry of Education, 2008). This is achieved by augmenting “the capacity of the universities, and the other education enterprises and the vocational training and the technical faculties with the concentration on the kind and the development of curricula in all the levels of education and training so that they keep up with the development requirements and the private sector needs” (Ministry of Education, 2008: 9).

To provide a measure of the Kingdom’s resources and funds committed to the advancement of education the Saudi Arabian government has made huge investments in both secondary-level and university-level education over the past few years. Clark (2012) states that in terms of secondary school enrolment spanning the period from 1999/ 2000 to 2009/ 2010, numbers have risen from 756,000 pupils to 1,200,000 pupils. Official statistics reveal that new enrolment for bachelor study has increased from 82,000 attending students in 1999/ 2000, - 32,000 were male, and 50,000 were female - to 228,000 for the years 2009/ 2010 - 114,000 male alumni and 114,000 female alumni (Clark, 2012). These figures have continued to show growth, as the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (2013) notes, demonstrating continued commitment to increasing levels of education amongst the whole population.

For those enrolled at a master’s level of study, new attendees increased in number from 1,600 (1999/ 2000) to 8,900 (2009/ 2010). In fact, for the academic years spanning 2008/ 2009 to 2009/ 2010, 5,000 new master’s students have been enrolled, which correlates with OECD figures for a global trend for increasing levels of higher education in all countries (OECD, 2013).

In addition, aggregate enrolment levels for those attending a master's course rose by 78% year-on-year, which translates as an increase of 11,000 pupils for 2008/ 2009 to that of 20,000 pupils for 2009/ 2010. However, as figure 2.4 indicates, there is still work to be done as the country is still below OECD averages (figure 2.4) for different levels of education.

FIGURE 2.4: EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IN G20 COUNTRIES

<i>Distribution of 25-64 year-olds, by highest level of education attained</i>										
	Pre- primary and primary education	Lower secondary education	ISCED 3C (short programme)	Upper secondary education		Post- secondary non- tertiary education	Tertiary education			All levels of education
				ISCED 3C (long programme) /3B	ISCED 3A		Type B	Type A	Advanced research programmes	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
<b>OECD</b>										
Australia	7	20	a	15	16	4	11	26	1	100
Austria	x(2)	16	1	47	6	10	7	12	x(8)	100
Belgium	13	17	a	10	24	2	18	17	1	100
Canada	3	8	a	x(5)	26	12	24	26	x(8)	100
Chile	15	13	x(5)	x(5)	45	a	10	16	n	100
Czech Republic	n	8	a	40	36	a	x(8)	17	x(8)	100
Denmark	n	23	1	36	6	n	6	27	1	100
Estonia	1	10	a	14	33	7	13	22	n	100
Finland	7	10	a	a	44	1	15	22	1	100
France	11	18	a	30	11	n	12	17	1	100
Germany	3	11	a	49	3	8	10	16	1	100
Greece	24	11	x(5)	6	26	9	7	17	n	100
Hungary	1	17	a	30	29	2	1	19	n	100
Iceland	2	26	6	14	11	9	4	28	1	100
Ireland	11	15	n	x(5)	24	12	16	21	1	100
Israel	11	7	a	9	28	a	15	30	1	100
Italy	12	33	1	7	32	1	n	14	n	100
Japan	x(5)	x(5)	x(5)	x(5)	55	a	19	25	x(8)	100
Korea	9	11	a	20	21	a	12	24	3	100
Luxembourg	10	7	5	18	20	4	15	18	2	100
Mexico	42	22	a	6	13	a	1	16	x(8)	100
Netherlands	8	19	x(4)	15	23	3	3	29	1	100
New Zealand	x(2)	20	7	12	9	11	16	24	x(8)	100
Norway	n	19	a	30	10	3	2	34	1	100
Poland	x(2)	11	a	31	31	4	x(8)	23	x(8)	100
Portugal	49	19	x(5)	x(5)	16	1	x(8)	14	1	100
Slovak Republic	1	8	x(4)	35	39	x(5)	1	16	n	100
Slovenia	2	15	a	26	33	a	11	11	2	100
Spain	19	28	a	8	14	n	9	21	1	100
Sweden	4	9	a	x(5)	46	7	9	25	x(8)	100
Switzerland	3	9	2	40	5	6	11	21	3	100
Turkey	58	11	a	8	10	a	x(8)	13	x(8)	100
United Kingdom	n	11	14	30	7	n	10	27	1	100
United States	4	7	x(5)	x(5)	47	x(5)	10	30	1	100
	Below upper secondary education			Upper secondary level of education			Tertiary level of education			
OECD average	26			44			30			
EU21 average	25			48			28			
<b>Other G20</b>										
Argentina <sup>1</sup>	44	14	a	28	x(5)	a	x(8)	14	x(8)	100
Brazil <sup>2</sup>	45	14	x(5)	x(5)	30	a	x(8)	11	x(8)	100
China <sup>3</sup>	42	40	m	3	10	m	3	1	n	100
India	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m	m
Indonesia <sup>4</sup>	61	15	a	19	x(5)	a	x(8)	5	x(8)	100
Russian Federation <sup>5</sup>	3	8	x(4)	16	18	x(4)	34	20	n	100
Saudi Arabia <sup>6</sup>	54	15	a	15	x(5)	a	x(8)	16	x(8)	100
South Africa <sup>4</sup>	36	36	a	23	x(5)	a	x(8)	5	x(8)	100
G20 average	41			33			26			

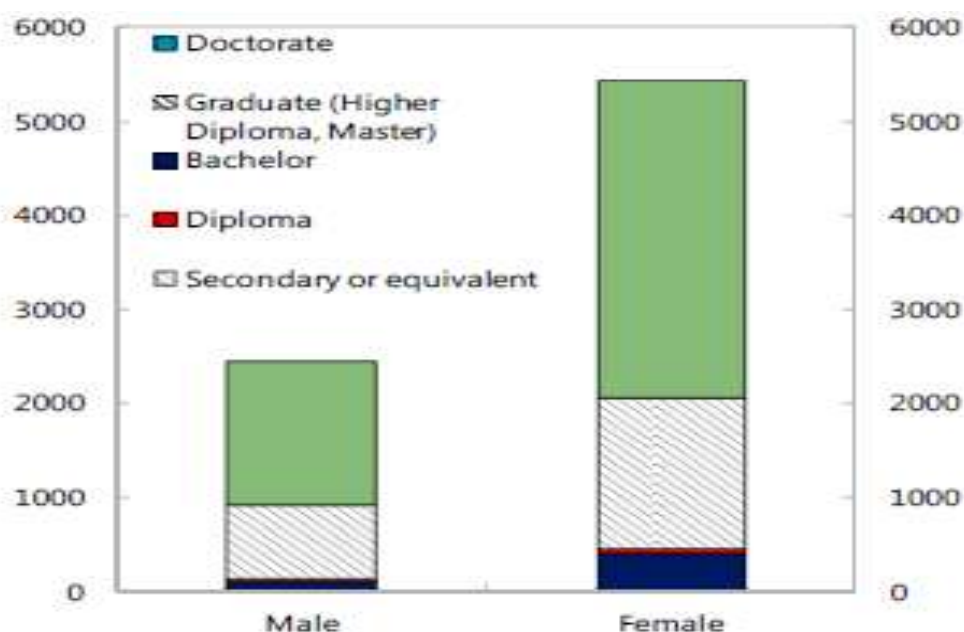
Source: OECD, (2012)



As a key strategic policy for the KSA to implement in order to enhance its educational system, the 2011 budget outlined plans to create 610 new schools to accompany the 3,200 schools already being constructed (Clark, 2012). Indeed for 2010, 600 schools were built to completion. The educational resources and funding accruing from the national budget is also to bolster building works to introduce new colleges and universities across the entire Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as well as ensure the Kingdom remains committed to encouraging its students to study overseas (Clark, 2012), a trend that is consistent with global practice according to OECD reports on education indicators (2013). Whilst this funding has clearly bolstered education, the access it provides to females is limited. This has an effect on the qualifications they can obtain. For example, certain subjects are prohibited to females which can reduce their potential routes of entry to the labour market (Aljughaiman & Grigorenko, 2013). Therefore, it is evident that education in Saudi Arabia has led to progress for women in the country, with wider access and attempts to reduce gender gaps at the educational level but that more may be required.

Certainly educating women in Saudi Arabia has reduced fertility and mortality rates, enhanced nutrition and overall health and led to a greater desire from women to enter the labour market (Islam, 2014). However, the structure “of the system of public education have been constraints on women’s realization of their equal opportunities in society and their full participation in the labour market” (Booz & Co., 2010, p. 1), all of which has been underlined by the country’s social norms, traditions and religious structure to create the low levels of participation in the labour market which currently exist. What is also notable is that despite the increased spend on education there has not been a correlated increase in the output and participation of females in the labour market, as shown in figure 2.5.

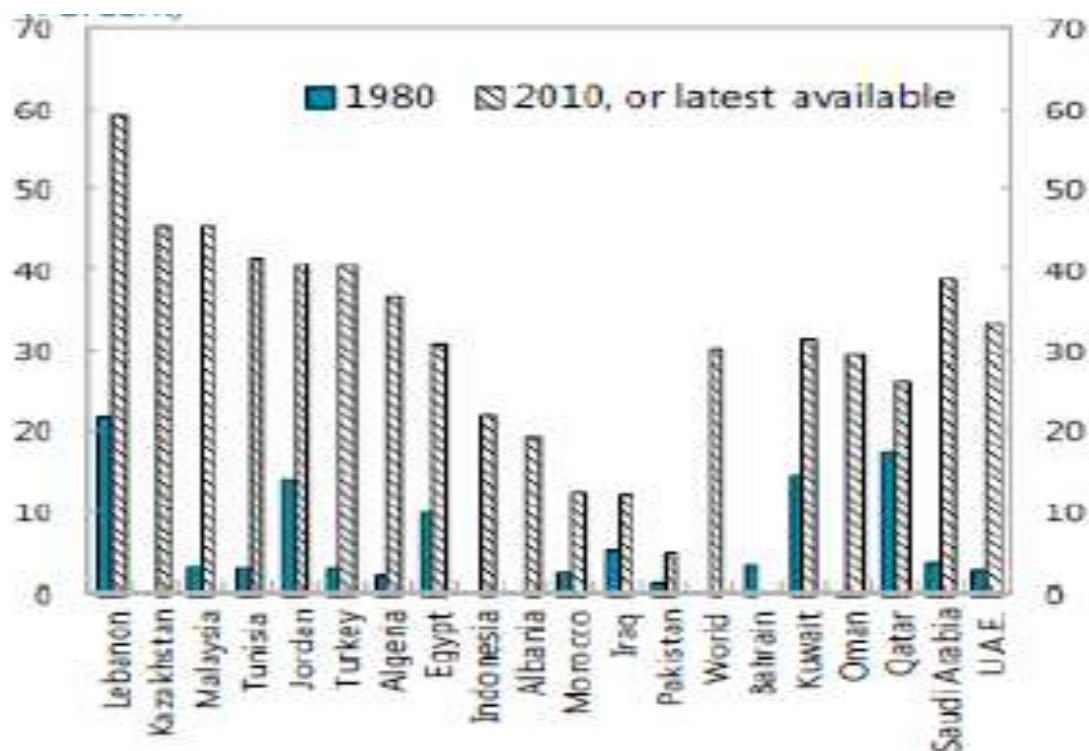
Figure 2.5: Saudi Population by Qualification and Gender



Source: IMF (2013)

This clear illustration of the gaps between qualified males and females and their participation in the labour market has been the subject of a variety of investigations, one suggestion being that the situation is in part due to the fact that the increased spending on female education which led to greater numbers of educational establishments compromised quality in relation to skills development. As Booz (2010, p.1) indicates, the reform was focused on changes to infrastructure and the issue of a loaded and stringent curriculum. What this has meant is that despite university education, skills gaps still exist, which are filled by the high participation of foreign labour in the country (Aljughaiman and Grigorenko, 2013). These perspectives notwithstanding, there are indications that females are becoming more highly qualified than males in the Kingdom (OECD, 2012), and are increasingly accessing education, as indicated by Figure 2.6.

Figure 2.6: Female Tertiary Education Enrolment 1980 vs 2010



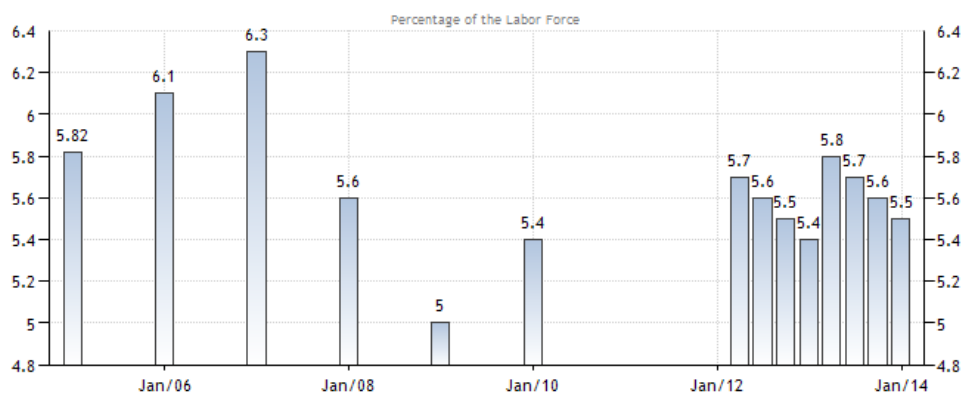
Source: IMF (2013)

These increased educational potentials and qualifications, however, are not translating to employment opportunities and this may be due to the situation within the overall Saudi labour market.

## 2.2 SAUDI ARABIA - EMPLOYMENT PROFILING

According to official figures, the unemployment level in Saudi Arabia is under 10% as Figure 2.7 indicates.

FIGURE 2.7: UNEMPLOYMENT RATES KSA JAN 2014



Source: Trading Economics (2014)

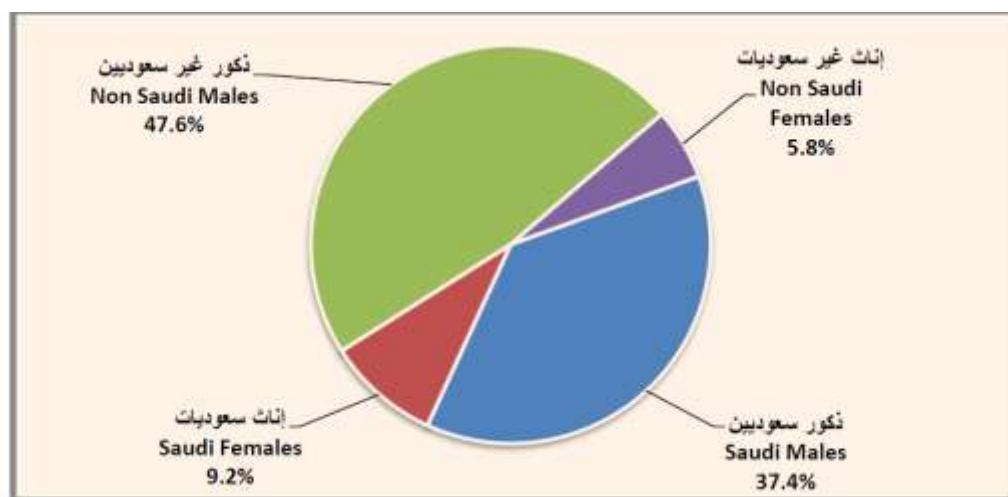
The difficulty with these figures is that they are based only on those in work or looking for work, which according to McDowall (2012) is only 36% of the population. In addition, it does not recognise that the unemployed represent 30% of young people (US department of Labour, 2010). The net result is that the newly introduced unemployment benefits for Saudi nationals are reaching high levels which have had a major impact on the overall economy of the country, particularly as the rates are in some cases higher than the potential salaries that could be earned, reducing the motivation seen when entering the job market (IMF, 2010).

Given these factors, it is clear that it is in the government's interest to increase participation of Saudi nationals, both male and female, in the labour market, which underlines the involvement of the state in the development of the market, a situation which will be discussed further in the literature review.

Essentially, as Alsheikh (2015) indicates, the Saudisation policy and related policy development in terms of Nitaqat (see chapter 2, pp. 77 – 78) requires that a specific percentage of employees of private sector organisations (depending on size), must be Saudi citizens (ibid). As a result, as Al-Abdullah (2012) notes, the Ministry of Education is working to identify which skills students need to acquire to make them more employable: particularly in the private sector, which is the focus of the Saudisation agenda. In the context of female participation in the labour market, Al-Fawzan (2012) notes that there are nearly 6 million Saudi women available to participate in the labour market of the country, which suggests that state intervention, will be necessary to create a situation where these females can gain employment. This is because of the nature of the country and the way that women are viewed in terms of their roles in society.

The profile in terms of employment within the country in 2010 is, as seen in Figure 2.8, showing a clear disparity between male/female and foreign and Saudi nationals employed in the country.

FIGURE 2.8: EMPLOYMENT PROFILE OF SAUDI ARABIA



Source: CDSI (2013)

One of the major points to note in this regard is that despite the fact that more than 50% of the labour force is foreign, only 5% of this group is female, which suggests that the gender gaps and restrictions to the labour market may only apply to Saudi females.

In terms of unemployment there is a similar picture, with a sizeable gap growing between Saudi male and female rates of unemployment. The female rate was more than three times greater than the rate for Saudi males spanning the time period from 2006 to 2008 (ILO, 2010). This gap grew rather significantly in 2009 to five times greater, with female unemployment rising 6 percentage points to 19%, whereas the male unemployment rate rose to a lesser extent of 0.2 percentage points to 3.7% (ILO, 2010). This is becoming more balanced but is not positive for the country overall, as Figure 2.9 indicates.

This data suggests that despite the significant strides in female participation in higher education (Al-Mubarak, 2011), their labour market situation has not only failed to improve, but has actually declined relative to males. This suggests that while Saudi women have shown equal, if not superior, academic and professional capability, the socio-cultural and economic factors that have traditionally held them back persist (Al-Dehailan, 2007). Al-Dehailan has attributed the inferior labour market situation of Saudi women to, among other things, attitudinal, cultural, and socio-economic factors. He suggests that although the number of women in higher education has increased since the creation of separate Department for female education, “these efforts concentrate more on quantity rather than quality and lack the variation in courses that are useful to the employment market” (ibid, p. 296). Furthermore, because Saudi law prohibits mixed work places and employers are reluctant to create separate workplaces for women, females are disadvantaged (Aimazroa, 2003 in Al-Dehailan, 2007).

FIGURE 2.9: MALE AND FEMALE GLOBAL LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION



Source: CDSI (2013)

This should, however, be taken in the context of the previously highlighted increased levels of education for women during the period and thus the likelihood that the females available for work increased in number which could potentially affect the data.

Even recognizing this, there is a gap between female and male unemployment levels in the Kingdom, which cannot be due to increased qualification levels alone. Consequently, another explanation which may apply relates to basic neoclassical supply and demand (see Section 3.2.1). In this regard, without a closer and more nuanced analysis of the current labour market situation of Saudi females, one may be driven to the conclusion that the increase in the number of highly educated and professional qualified females has resulted in an increase in the supply relative to the demand for those with these particular characteristics. Such a conclusion, however, as with almost all neo-classical analysis of the labour market, will ignore the unique cultural and social characteristics of the Saudi context and the resultant gender inequality that it perpetuates and sustains.

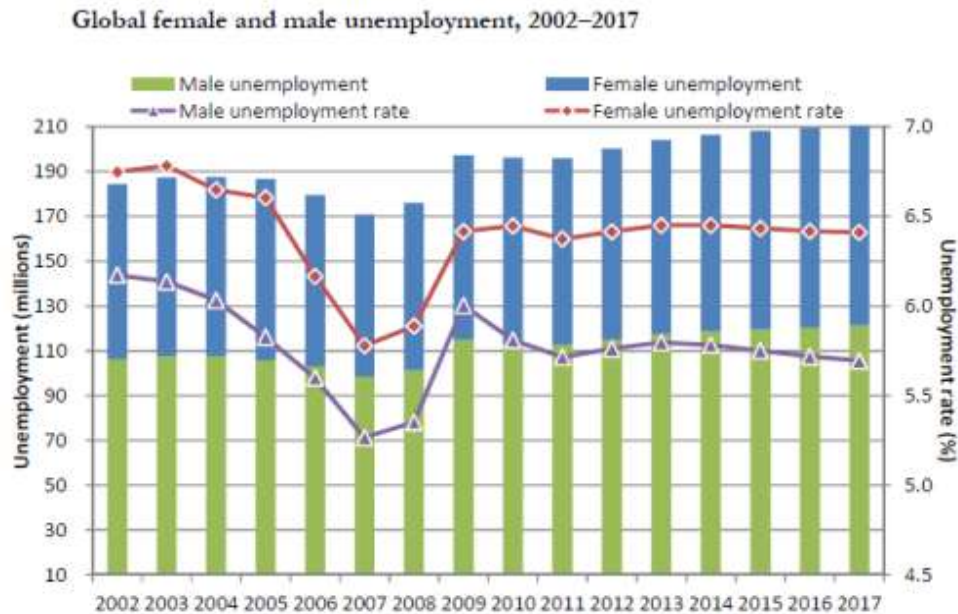
More recent assessment of Saudi Arabia's unemployment statistics can be achieved with reference to data presented by the Central Department of Statistics and Information (CDSI) of Saudi Arabia, which are reported on by Aluwaisheg (2013) on behalf of 'Arab News'. Comparing labour market participation across the four categories by gender and by nationality, Aluwaisheg (2013) concludes that despite labour market intervention by government to give priority employment to Saudi citizens, evidence indicate increasing dependence on foreign labour.

The section to follow provides more detail specifically concerning female participation in the labour market,

### **2.2.1 Global Female Participation in the Labour Market**

On a global scale, figures from the EU (2014) suggest that across the world, there is a level of disparity in participation but that Saudi Arabia has one of the highest at 56.8 percentage points' difference in male: female activity in the labour market. Figure 2.10 shows the overall global variations in male and female unemployment.

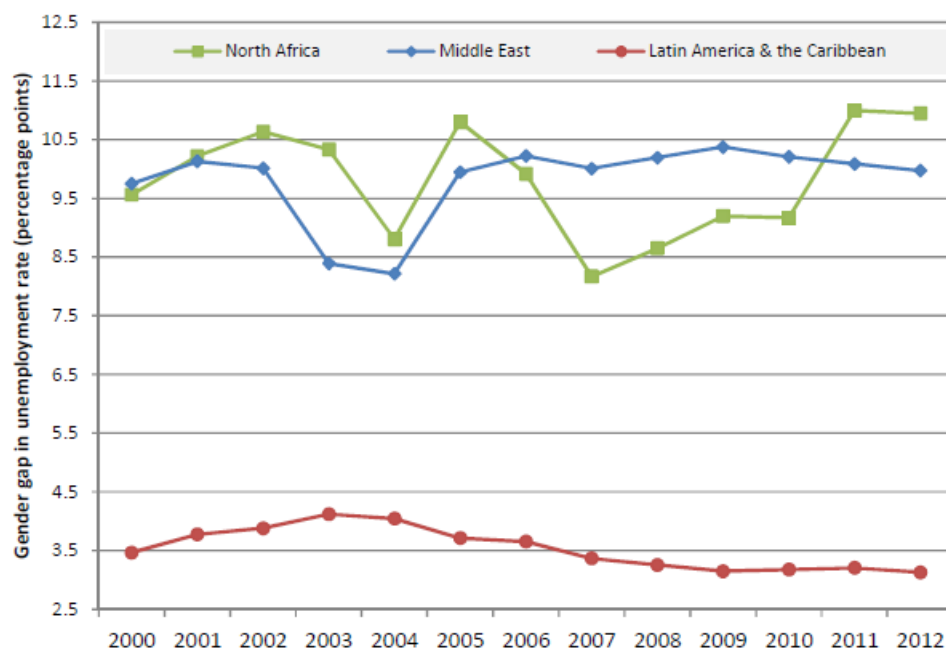
FIGURE 2.10: MALE AND FEMALE GLOBAL LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION



Source: ILO (2012)

As the figures indicate, women's participation in the labour market, having seen a dip in the period from 2007-2008 is not predicted to rise which is causing concern about the potential global factors that may be impacting on this (ILO, 2012). In addition, the specific situation in the Middle East, where the KSA is situated can be seen as having a high comparative female unemployment rate as displayed in Figure 2.11.

FIGURE 2.11: REGIONAL FEMALE UNEMPLOYMENT



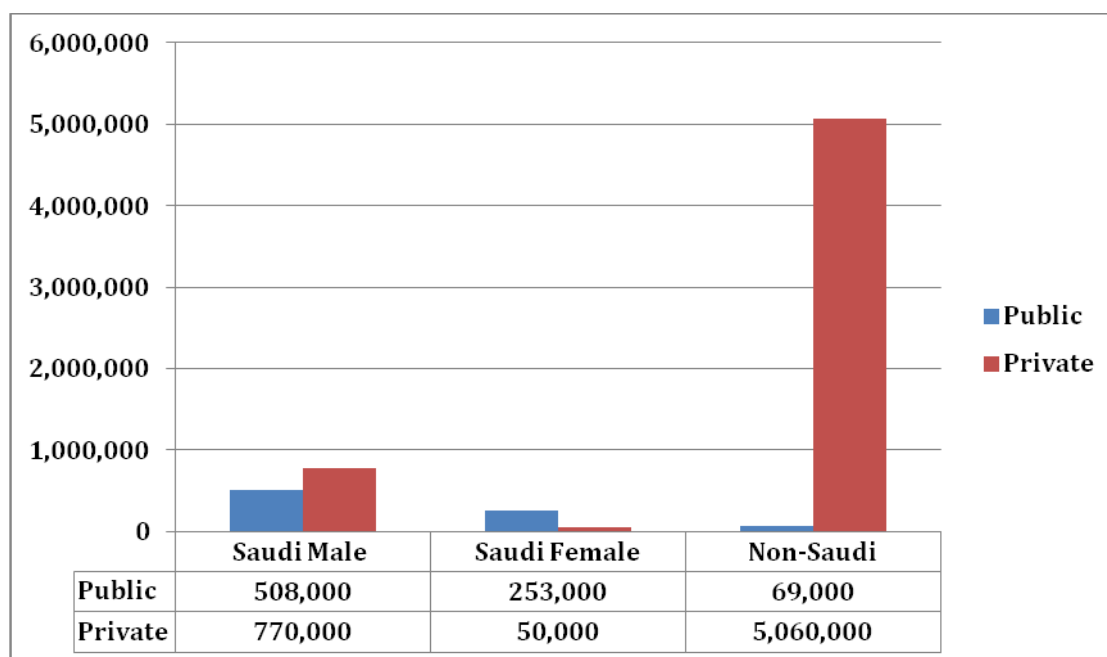
Source: ILO (2012).



At the same time the report from the ILO highlights the sectorisation of females into service industries, rather than manufacturing or agriculture, a view supported by the findings of Hertog (2012). In that regard, the Saudi labour market is not entirely dissimilar to the UK in terms of female employment being predominantly in the service sector (Kersley et al., 2005). However, while the situation in the UK is much a reflection of structural changes in the UK economy (Bach, 2005), the Saudi situation seems as, Al-Dehailan (2007) suggests to be the result of sociocultural design and an education system that deliberately limits women's labour opportunities to specific sectors of the economy. What this suggests for Saudi Arabia employment statistics is that whilst numbers may be partially reflective of some trends in relation to female employment and labour market participation around the globe (ILO, 2012), the discrepancies between genders are higher in the region.

The other disconcerting factor for the Saudi government in relation to their Saudisation programme, which can be seen from the above figures, is that increasing percentages of females are currently inactive in the labour market, which suggests that a high proportion of the potential labour force in the country is not registered as unemployed, and is not actively seeking entry to the labour market. This may in part be due to the difficulties associated with labour market segmentation, identified in figure 2.12.

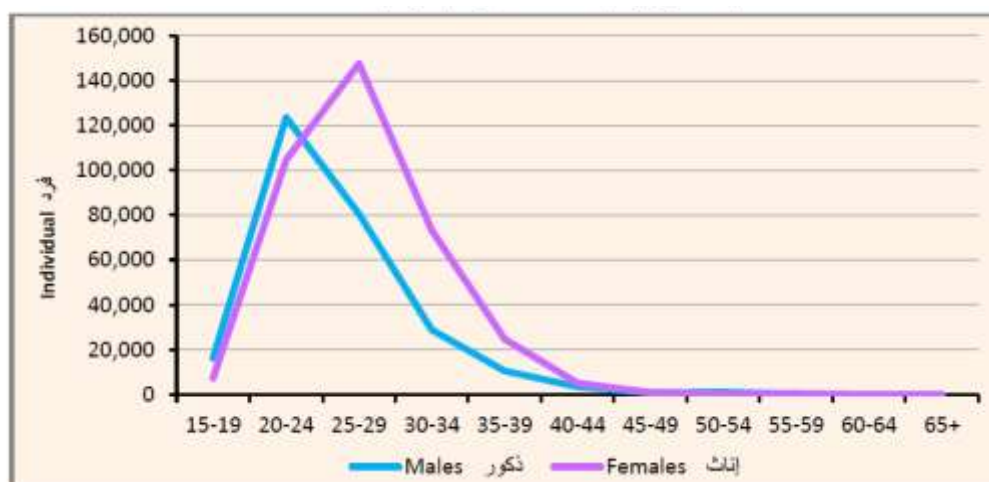
FIGURE 2.12: LABOUR MARKET SEGMENTATION IN SAUDI



Source: Hertog (2012).

Specifically, as Hertog (2012) highlights, Saudi women have struggled to find employment in the private sector, and are frequently directed to jobs in health care or education. This situation is particularly notable when working – age young women are considered (Al-Asfour and Khan, 2013), as shown in figure 2.13, which highlights the major gap between females and males in the 20-39 age group.

FIGURE 2.13: UNEMPLOYMENT BY AGE GROUP



Source: CDSI, 2013.

The gaps highlighted by the figure above reinforce the importance of understanding the labour market in the country and thus the effect on female participation in relation to unemployment levels in the younger generation. This group has benefited from the improved education within the country and thus should be seen as more employable. However, the rate of unemployed for 20 to 24 year-olds across the whole population (foreign and national) is 30.2% but for nationals alone is 39.3%. Whilst as already noted there is a high reliance on foreign labour, there is an indication that nationals work primarily in the public sector rather than looking for, and gaining, employment within the private sector (Williams *et al.*, 2011). To understand why this is so, the historical factors, which impact on the Saudi labour market need to be explored.

### **2.2.2 Historical factors**

According to Mahdi (2008) many of the factors that impact on the Saudi labour market's reliance on foreign nationals goes back to the establishment of the Kingdom and the discovery of oil in the country. Prior to this, KSA was a predominantly subsistence agricultural economy with the main focus being on the raising of livestock, with fishing and cultivation also being drivers of economic prosperity for individuals, regions and the state. These were managed by family or mutual collaboration between the nomadic tribes; as such a labour market as understood by western markets did not exist within the Kingdom (Mahdi and Barrientos, 2003).

It was only in certain areas such as irrigation where waged labour existed, and then only for males, with women playing only an informal role, supporting their families. However, as the oil boom began many families found that the female role moved from farming and traditional support to the homemaker role deemed more culturally relevant (Al-Dosary, 2004).

At the same time, as Mahdi (2000) highlights, the growing oil economy required foreign labour to be brought in as the skills required were not available within the national population because of the lack of development in education and training for these new industries, and particularly for women.

Initially, education was not seen as vital to labour demand and certainly for women formal education did not begin until the early 1960s in the Kingdom. As such, as Al-Dosary (2004) notes, there was a resultant discrepancy between skills of native workers and the need for modern technology that was required to maximise the oil wealth. Since this time as noted above in relation to education there have been major improvements in increasing the skill set of the national labour force, including that of women, but this does not appear to be impacting on the female participation within the labour market.

More recently, in July 2009, during a time when an economic slowdown was being experienced by the country, as noted above, the Saudi Employment Strategy was introduced (OECD, 2011). The objectives, policies and processes had been in planning for several years and focused on addressing issues within the labour market in an efficient and strategic way. The essence of the plan was that the strategy would embody support for the national economy by increasing employability and productivity of Saudi nationals “in preparation for employment in emerging sectors of the economy” (OECD, 2011: 1).

In terms of more specific details, the Employment Strategy is based on the belief that the labour market in the Kingdom is part of the overall national economy due to the integral relationship that exists between reforms of the labour market and the economic reform necessary for the Kingdom to continue to grow (KSA Ministry of Labour, 2014). As a result the intent was to establish a “strong institutionalized partnership between public and private sector players that constitute the country’s economy” (KSA Ministry of Labour, 2014, p. 3).

Specifically, this should include an approach that would enable standards and indicators to be established that could measure progress and implementation of the overall Saudisation agenda. A key facet of the Employment Strategy and thus relevant for this work is that there would be increased participation of Saudi nationals, both male and female, in the labour market and strategies for how this can be achieved.

The overall focus of the Saudisation was to reduce the country's reliance on foreign nationals. However, as the OECD (2011) note, this has had limited success due to a discrepancy in skills which exists from deficiencies in education but also to the beliefs of the Saudi nationals in relation to specific employment roles and crucially the "extremely low participation of women in the labour force" (OECD, 2011: 2). Specifically, the overall rates of employment do not match with those in the rest of the world (see Figure 2.14):

FIGURE 2.14: RATES OF EMPLOYMENT IN THE ARAB WORLD

Selected Rates - Latest Data Available											
		Labour Force Participation		Employment to Population		Paid to Total Employment		Unemployment		Youth Unemployment	
		Rate (%)	Var. (pp.)	Rate (%)	Var. (pp.)	Rate (%)	Var. (pp.)	Rate (%)	Var. (pp.)	Rate (%)	Var. (pp.)
Algeria	2010	41.7	↑0.3	37.6	↑0.4	33.4	↑0.3	10.0	✓-0.2	21.5	✗0.2
Bahrain	2010							3.7	✓-0.1		
Egypt	2010 <sup>a</sup>	50.3	↑1.2	42.5	↑1.5	59.1	↓-3.2	8.9	✓-0.5	24.8	✓-5.1
Iraq	2008 <sup>b</sup>							15.3	n.a.	43.5	n.a.
Jordan	2010	39.5	↓-0.7	34.6	↓-0.4	83.5	↑0.1	12.5	✓-0.4	28.1	✗1.1
Kuwait	2008 <sup>c</sup>							7.7	n.a.		
Lebanon	2007	43.4	n.a.	39.5	n.a.			9.0	n.a.	22.1	n.a.
Morocco	2010 <sup>d</sup>	49.6	↓-0.4	44.6	↓-0.2	44.4	↑0.5	9.1	✓-0.1	17.6	✓-0.3
Qatar	2009	87.7	↑0.3	87.4	↑0.3	99.6	↑0.1	0.3	⚠0.0	1.2	n.a.
Saudi Arabia	2009	49.9	↓-0.4	47.2	↓-0.5			5.4	✓-0.4	29.9	✗0.6
Sudan <sup>e</sup>	2008							20.7	✗1.3		
Syria	2010	43.7	↑0.7	42.0	↑0.9	62.7	↑0.9	8.4	✗0.2	18.3	✓-0.8
Tunisia	2010	46.9	↑0.4	40.8	↑0.4			13.0	✓-0.2	29.4	✓-1.5
U.A. Emirates	2008	72.6	n.a.	69.7	n.a.	95.8	n.a.	4.0	n.a.	12.1	n.a.
West Bank and Gaza	2010 <sup>f</sup>	39.5	↓-2.0	29.8	↓-1.6	67.6	↑1.1	23.7	✓-0.8	40.2	✗5.1
Yemen	2009	42.2	↓-0.6	36.1	↓-0.4			14.6	✓-0.3		

Source: ILO, Department of Statistics

Notes a Egypt: 2010 only data for unemployment. Rest of rates correspond to 2007

b Iraq: Data for Youth Unemployment rate correspond to 2006

c Kuwait: Data refer only to Kuwaiti unemployment

d Morocco: Data for Employment to Population correspond to 2009

e Sudan: Official estimates

f West Bank and Gaza: Data for Youth Unemployment rate correspond to 2008

n.a. Data from the immediately preceding year are not available for computation of annual variation

↓	Negative Variation	✗	Increase in Unemployment
→	No Variation	⚠	No Variation
↑	Positive Variation	✓	Decrease in Unemployment

Source: ILO (2011).

The figure underscores earlier indications regarding the low levels of participation across the whole population and the high levels of youth unemployment, both of which are affected by the high dependence on foreign labour which currently exists within the Saudi labour market and thus affects the overall Saudisation agenda and ultimately female participation in the market. The rather high dependence on foreign labour and the realisation of the implications of this for increased youth unemployment and potential consequences of social unrest, drive the labour market intervention policy and agenda of Saudisation, which is discussed in the following subsection.

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### 2.3 THE SAUDISATION AGENDA AND LABOUR MARKET ISSUES

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Saudisation is essentially a labour market indigenisation proposition and, in that respect, it is not, as highlighted later in this chapter, unique to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Therefore, in the Saudi context, it refers to policy that aims to give the employment needs of Saudi citizens precedence over those of foreign workers. Although some government officials have tried to rationalise the policy with the argument that foreign workers may potentially have the skills, they lack the practical background and cultural familiarity necessary for the Saudi economy (Ramady, 2010). However, others have identified relatively more plausible political and social arguments. In that regard, they make reference to the demography of Saudi Arabia and, in particular, to the fact that over 60% of the country's population is below 30 and youth unemployment stands at about 30% (Murphy, 2011). It follows from this line of argument that the Saudisation agenda derives from the Monarchy's concerns about the social implications for growing youth unemployment which portends potential political and social unrest (ibid).

Although approaches vary from country to country and even region to region, in the context of GGC countries, Saudisation, like "Omanisation and Emiratisation, represents labour market interventions by governments to reduce reliance on foreign expatriate labour" (Rees et al., 2007, p. 34).

Accordingly, Abdelkarim defines such interventions as “a multi-level process through which dependency on the expatriate labour force is reduced and Nationals are prepared to take up jobs performed by expatriates” (2001, in Rees et al., p. 6). These policy interventions should be seen in the demographic context of a large youth population, as mentioned previously, and in which Saudi Arabia mirrors not just its Middle Eastern neighbours, but even countries outside that region (Murphy, 2011).

Rees et al point to “parallels in other regions of the world” (2007, p. 2). In that regard, they refer to post-colonial ‘Africanisation’ of public sector institutions and employment as the unique and common paradigm among African country. Consequently, although like many Gulf Corporation countries, South Africa for example, has similar demographic problems, with the “important characteristic of ...unemployment crisis” that is concentrated “in the 15–34 age cohort, and, therefore, seen as a problem of youth unemployment” (Mayer et al., 2011, p. 8). While recognising the relative lack of skills among the young; the South African approach, which began in 1994, focused on spurring demand through a National Public Works Programme (NPWP), whereby the government invested in labour intensive public and community infrastructure as mean of creating employment. Since then, the government has made steady and sometimes, substantial annual increases in public expenditure on public infrastructure, environmental and social projects (ibid.). Youth unemployment has been claimed to be the trigger for recent violence against foreign nationals in South Africa (Huffington Post, 2015).

What distinguishes South Africa from Saudi Arabia in terms of labour market intervention on behalf of its citizens, is that the former’s intervention strategy is consistent with the Africanisation paradigm, in terms of its public sector focus (Rees et al., 2007). Although such labour market intervention policies in developing and emerging economies tend to be cast in terms of indigenisation, there is evidence to suggest such policies are not unique to these contexts.

State intervention into labour markets is not limited to developing and emerging economies. Within the European Union, despite for example some strong arguments that “increased immigration is likely to be part of any strategy to keep European social security systems solvent” and the added evidence that “popular sentiment notwithstanding; the employment consequences of immigration for European natives have probably been modest” (Bauer and Zimmermann, 1999 in Angrist and Kugler, 2003, p. 1). Angrist and Kugler highlight the increasing demands for restricting immigration into Europe. Thus, some European political parties and governments have put in place national level initiatives and programmes that are aimed at restricting immigration on the grounds of protecting the jobs of their citizens (ibid.). In the UK, for example, alongside unprecedented and strict visa and English language requirements, the government has yearly caps on non-EU skilled and professional workers, which has been frozen at about 22, 000 since 2011 (Migration Observatory, 2014)

However, although Saudisation and similar interventions in GCC countries like UAE and Oman, may be motivated by similar concerns and sentiments, perhaps what distinguishes Saudisation most from the labour market intervention policies in the UK and South Africa, is the direct nature of the intervention to affect employment practices in individual private sector organisations. According to Mellahi (2007) before early 2000s, the Saudi government took a laissez – faire attitude to HRM in the private sector, noting, that the 1969 Labour law “was limited to contractual issues and did not significantly interfere in the process and the way people were managed in the private sector. As a consequence, employers in the private sector had limited legal obligations towards their predominantly” (p. 85). However, even when Saudi Arabia, like most GCC countries, was gearing up to adapt to the new global neoliberal dispensation that emerge in the 1980s, it was also becoming very apparent that the mixture of demographic and economic factors such as high birth rate, growing youth population and youth unemployment, presented “an



indisputable threat to the social and political stability” of the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council countries (Mellahi and Al-Hinai, 2000: 178). This potential political and social threat has been advanced as justification for direct intervention into the hiring patterns and practices of private sector organisations. As in Saudi Arabia (see Alsheikh, 2015 on Nitiqat targets), the UAE Emiritisation legislation set target for UAE national composition of the workforce at both sectoral and organisation levels (Rees et al 2007). For example, the banking sector is required to achieve a 50% Emiritisation target and going beyond the sectoral and organisational level, the law also requires every expatriate to pay a monthly ‘Emiratisation and Levy’ of approximately, £1.30), to finance a national human resource development programme for UAE citizens (ibid).

Despite such radical interventions, reviews of these policies are generally negative (Alsheikh, 2015; Al-Dehailan, 2007; Metcalf, 2007). Crucially, with respect to impact on the category which is the focus of this study, Metcalf notes that despite the growing recognition of importance of female labour market participation and government intervention within the context of:

“Islamic framework to support “women’s advancement in the public sphere, the empirical data show that women experience career and development constraints on account of equal but different gender roles, and that gender or equality issues are largely absent from HRM organization policy” (p. 54).

There are a number of socio-cultural and economic explanations for this failure that could be deduced from the quotation above, which also gives further credibility to Al-Dehailan’s (2007) arguments (see Section 2.2.1, page 44) regarding the relative decline in female employment in comparison to male employment.

Like Al-Dehailan's argument, the idea of "equal but different gender roles" in the context of an Islamic framework implies differences in skills and professional requirements and, therefore, labour market concerns. Consequently, even where policies overtly suggest good intent and imply positive outcomes, the nature of intent and aspired outcomes are gendered and, in the sphere of wage employment outside of home, in unintended (or should be intended) outcome is the further entrenchment of the traditional advantage that men have enjoyed over women. In that regard, despite the fact that over 70% of the unemployed in Saudi Arabia are women, Ministry of Labour data also indicate that about 700,000 women job seekers have turned down offers for employment in private sector organisations (Al-Amri, 2014). This is consistent with the argument raised earlier with reference to the Saudi American Bank study (2000), that Saudi citizens tend to shun private sector employment as being less prestigious and yet challenging in comparison to public sector employment.

However, as also elaborated extensively in Chapter 2, pages 81-82, there are a number of difficulties with this, including the flexibility and cost of foreign workers. For example, foreign workers in the country are frequently paid less because many come from low income countries such as Indonesia which can be a benefit for employers due to the high levels of labour supply from these countries. In addition, foreign workers will be happy to move around the Kingdom for work, which nationals are not. This is further complicated by the bureaucratic difficulties involved in transferring a Saudi national from one area to another (Ramady, 2010).

In addition, as Murphy (2011) goes on explain, a significant number of Saudi nationals are relatively less skilled and professionally able compared to foreign workers. Yet, in a social system with very strong in-group and weak out-group relations, foreign employers find it challenging to dismiss Saudi nationals who are underperforming but the same does not apply to foreign workers (Addalla, 1997 in Mellahi and Wood, 2005).

Thus for many employers, particularly in the private sector, local labour is relatively expensive in regard to basic salaries but also due to the requirements relating to indirect labour costs (UNDP, 2005a). These factors have contributed to the high levels of unemployment seen among nationals, but particularly for women, although these are further compounded by social and cultural factors.

Notwithstanding this, there are small signs that accessibility to the labour market is improving for females in KSA as a result of the government and monarchy's programme of Saudisation and a recognition that the male population alone cannot increase the ratios of Saudi to foreign nationals working in the country and that therefore there is a need to open up new avenues of employment for females (Abu-Nasr, 2013; Mahdi, 2008). This is supported by the recognition by King Abdullah that women in the Kingdom have a role to play both in society and in the labour market as well as the wider development and modernisation of the country. However, as the figure 2.15 indicates, across the whole population of females, there is a very low rate of labour market participation.

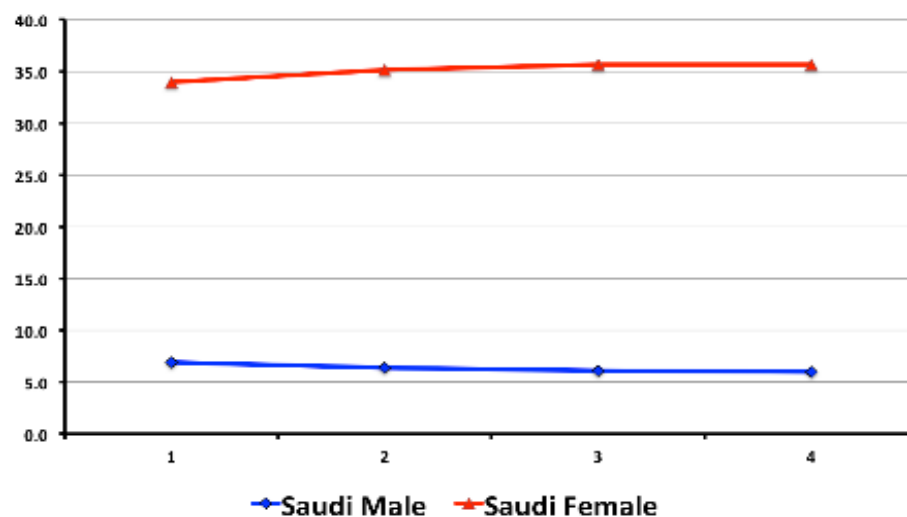
FIGURE 2.15: FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOUR MARKET BY REGION



Source: [www.cdsi.gov.sa](http://www.cdsi.gov.sa) 2013

The monarch's approach, along with government initiatives to increase female participation, are potentially reducing, at least, some of the opposition that has been seen in the past to female participation in the labour market in the Kingdom. This is linked with some evidence employers actively making adaptations to working environments to accommodate female employees such as; washroom facilities, and additional entry points and workspaces. These adaptations thus allow maintenance of Islamic segregation rules and the place of women in society but also allow for a widening of access to the labour market (McDowell, 2013; Patterson, 2013). Despite these advances and indications that accessibility to the labour market is improving, recent trends in the country towards higher unemployment have however hit women harder, as Figure 2.16 highlights.

FIGURE 2.16: UNEMPLOYMENT RATES BY GENDER IN KSA



Source: Curley (2013)

In particular, the statistics show that unemployment for females in Saudi Arabia was on the rise in 2013, from 34% to approximately 36% from the initial quarter of 2012 to the final quarter of 2012, whereas for Saudi males unemployment fell, from 6.9% to 6.0% (Aluwaisheg, 2013; Curley, 2013). These figures are however disputed by the Saudi government, whose position is that reports of climbing unemployment levels are exaggerated (Zawya, 2014).

The difficulty in discerning between contesting views regarding unemployment among females is further compounded by the fact that whilst in 1999 the female rate of unemployment was half what is seen today, the economy of Saudi Arabia has grown. This would normally lead to a more stable level of unemployment, but this is not the case in KSA (Aluwaisheg, 2013). However, as Curley (2013) notes, this does not necessarily imply a negative approach in the labour market to female employment. Rather, it highlights the increasing number of females who are qualifying and wishing to enter the labour market and thus marketing themselves as being available for work. With more than 500,000 females graduating in the last ten years, having benefitted from the support provided by free education and study abroad programmes, against 300,000 men. This suggests that females available for work are growing in number and that this is just another reflection of the new focus to increase equality in labour market opportunities within the country.

The increasing in female labour market participation that is alluded to in the preceding paragraphs can be attributed to the classical labour market theory of supply and demand for labour. However, in this case, the focus here concerns the supply of female graduate labour in the Saudi Labour market. The new focus is highlighted by Aluwaisheg (2013), who notes from CDSI figures that increasing numbers of Saudi females are being employed outside of the home, and whilst only a marginal increase of 43,000 over a 12 month period, this does indicate a growing desire of women to enter the labour market in the country. The growth is however, small, as the 647,000 females employed in 2013 represents only 10% of all working age Saudi females. When compared with female employment levels of an average of 57% in industrialised nations according to World Bank Figures (World Bank, 2013), this suggests that there are still barriers to female employment in the country.

From a neoclassical point of view, therefore, whilst higher education data show a significant rise in the supply of qualified female graduates and professionals, the CDSI suggests very limited movement in demand. What this suggests is that unless there is a slowdown in the rate of increase in educational and professional attainment among Saudi females, which compares with the rates of demand for their skills and abilities, the increase in female unemployment is likely to grow worse.

The efforts to encourage greater levels of education have led to a reversal of the previous situation where Saudi women who had one of the lowest literacy rates in the world. Currently, Saudi Arabia has one of the highest levels of university level learning, and have higher levels of graduate education than males (Yousif, 2011; Ramady, 2010). However, this increased level of education and qualifications has not translated into increased participation within the labour market or the creation of sufficient employment opportunities for females. Thus, as indicated on the preceding page, while there is increasing female labour market participation (supply), the opportunities (demand) are at best stagnant and, at worst, falling.

Furthermore, as Aluwaisheg (2013) notes, CDSI figures indicated that 80% of all unemployed Saudi females have a university degree (Aluwaisheg, 2013), whilst 60% of Saudi women with a PhD are unemployed (Curley, 2013). What this highlights, as Abu-Nasr (2013) indicates, there is significant underutilisation of the potential of Saudi women, which, as he goes on to argue, seems illogical given that, increasingly, Saudi Arabia is consuming much of what it produces, with increasingly limited potential for export. In particular, it is argued, in order for the Saudi Arabian economy to redress any imbalances for it to remain sustainable and operate viably, in the long run, its dependence on ever-increasing oil revenues is hardly “feasible”. This suggests therefore that if the Saudi economy does not remain robust and competitive, the Kingdom must find imaginative ways of utilising its human resources and especially the most educated and skilled.

That in turn requires some radical yet socially measured labour market interventions which draw on institutional theories of the labour market (Lipsey and Chrystal, 2007, 2011).

The next section applies institutional theory in terms of state intervention in the Saudi Arabian labour market. In that regard, it draws on and attempts to explain policy intervention in the form of the indigenisation of the Saudi Labour market through the policy of Saudisation of labour market, which simply refers to state intervention for purposes of giving priority employment to Saudi nationals. However, in order to set this policy in context and in light of the core aim and objectives of this study, it is imperative to present a brief demographic profile of the Saudi labour market.

### **2.3.1 Saudi Labour Market: demographic profile**

As a country goes through structural change, for example the Saudisation process in the Kingdom, there is a realization that the demographics of the labour market will of necessity undergo distinct changes, some of which were noted through illustrations of the changing labour market in the UK as it moved from a manufacturing focus to one based on service. This is also recognized by the government in KSA, as noted in the UNDP Gender Mainstreaming Report (2007) with the following specific aims highlighted in the 8th 5 Year National Plan:

- a) Campaigns to encourage social acceptance of women's work
- b) Increase female employees in public sector employment including in areas of administration and technical tasks
- c) Facilitate self-employment of women through savings and financial support
- d) Increase female learning in science, mathematics and engineering.

This list, whilst not exhaustive, does indicate that the government has a clear commitment to increase female employment in the Kingdom.

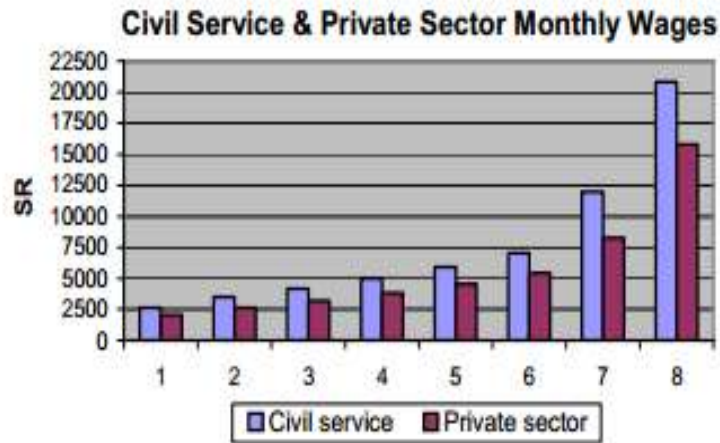
Within these changes, it has already been highlighted that one of the means for achieving some of these aims is the increase in female participation in the labour market, potentially through flexible, temporary, or shift-based working patterns. To understand what this means in the Saudi context, it is thus pertinent to consider the overall demographics of the current labour market, which were briefly covered earlier in this chapter.

### **2.3.2 Saudisation: the process of Indigenisation**

The term “indigenisation” refers in the context of labour markets to the process of increasing national participation in the overall labour market and economy of a country and is a process that has been occurring in a number of Gulf States that have previously relied on foreign labour (Gonzalez et al. 2008; IOM, 2010; Alsheikh, 2015). Similar to her neighbours, these efforts have failed to address fundamental labour market problems in Saudi Arabia and migrant labour remains very attractive to employers as the main source of securing efficiencies and addressing skill gaps in the labour market. There is evidence that the Saudisation has resulted in private sector employment growth, with almost 90% of jobs created between 1995 and 2000 being in the private sector (Saudi American Bank, 2000). However, the same and other sources also indicate most Saudi citizens consider public sector employment more prestigious and generally do not want private sector work. This, as Bartarfi (2013) highlights is reinforced by the lower working hours and workload compared to private firms, even if the private sector offers higher rates of pay as figure 2.17 indicates.



FIGURE 2.17: PAY RATES IN PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SECTOR



Source: Hertog (2012)

Moreover, many private sector employers are also not so keen on employing Saudi citizens because of relative cost implications and difficulties in managing them (Mellahi, and Wood, 2000). As a result, many private sector employers have previously tried to remove their Saudi employees and replace them with foreign workers; although as Ramady (2013) found this has been much harder since the introduction of the Nitaqat quotas. There do however remain major challenges for the state in ensuring success for its process of Saudisation, particularly with relevance to female graduates due to the previously highlighted factors regarding female roles in society, and the reluctance of females to work in the private sector or in low paid, unskilled jobs. A situation which is further hampered by the provision of unemployment benefits for Saudi nationals (UN, 2011).

With regard to the state's impact on the labour market, therefore, it can be seen that there is a constant involvement through direct and indirect regulation. Essentially the state has a level of control over the factors which impact on the labour market, as already noted this can include whether education is free and accessible, levels of employment benefits, introduction of minimum wages, equal opportunities quotas and in the case of Saudi Arabia, the need to increase numbers of Saudi nationals employed (Rutledge et al, 2011).

A nuanced analysis of the role of the Saudi State in the regulation of the Saudi labour market may require a brief engagement with theory about the nature of the state and with some of the related labour market theory.

State intervention in the labour market is based on its general definition as comprising of the current government, combined with the institutions and agencies that create the regulations and oversee adherence, compliance and implementation of legislation within the labour market (Kaufman, 2008). In regards to interference and thus impact on the labour market, therefore, the state clearly has the power to shape how the market progresses. In response to relatively low rates of labour market participation among youth – the IMF (2014) put this at about 25 per cent respectively among men and women, with potential for increase participation especially among women who are attaining higher levels of education compared to men, most Gulf Corporation Council countries, including Saudi Arabia have adopted indigenisation policies of their labour markets (ibid).

In order to address labour market problems, the state has a number of ways available to it including; leveraging its role as an employer (Seifert, 1992), income regulator, and management of the overall economy and controlling migration. The latter, is particularly relevant to the case of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Corporation countries that have significant numbers of foreign nationals working in the country (IMF, 2014; Alsheikh, 2015; Gennard and Judge, 2005). Furthermore, the state can introduce legislative and policy directives and, specifically, the National Vocational Training system (NVET) that are designed to increase equality across the labour market and, legislate and reinforce the process of indigenisation, including compelling employers to give priority to Saudi nationals through a quota system as part of the Saudisation process (Alsheikh, 2015; Ramady, 2010).

In addition to these impacts on the wider labour market, it is possible for the State to be an example in regard to best practice and employee relations standards combined with effective economic management – this concerns the idea of the state as a model employer and projecting and influencing good employment relations (Farnham, 2000). The economic policies of a State will impact or interfere with the proper functioning of the labour market and any possibility of achieving the equilibrium identified by neo-classicist theory due to the effect of the policies on stability, job demands and employer actions. Economic policies mean in effect that the State can influence workplace conditions, and provide laws for protection of individuals which include diversity issues (Torrington and Taylor, 2009). This is clearly evidenced in Saudi Arabia with the complex and costly regulations that exist in regard to removing Saudi nationals from employment and the high costs of employer insurance and other safeguards.

A relatively less emphasised theory of the labour market, which may have relatively less relevance to Saudi Arabia, is the *radical institutional perspective*, which critiques both the competitive market theory and the institutional market theory for not also embracing the power relationship between those looking for work and those looking for labour. The theory argues that relationship between labour and capital is eschewed in favour of capital, because it determines tastes and dependencies and therefore generates a supply of labour that is not controlled by market imperatives (Lee and Bekken, 2009). As such, “there is absolutely no reason to presume that the forces that operate within labour markets interact more or less harmoniously and efficiently to grind out equilibrium levels of employment” (Fine, 1998: 251).

What this means is that there may be conflict between the requirements of the State and corporations, and the needs and thus motivation to expend labour of the population.

In effect the theory attempts to explain the fragmented nature of the labour market based on understanding of the fact that more than any other commodity, labour is affected by pay rates, mobility of the workforce as well as institutional and social forces (Spencer, 2008). This approach challenges the more economics-based nature of traditional labour market theories which are focused on more basic supply and demand relationship. By taking the view that the historical capitalist view of the labour market does not incorporate the psychological or social factors that impact on a workforce this theory takes a much wider view of the reasons why individuals participate in, or are unable to access, a particular labour market and also the reasons for the conflict of interests between those in the labour market looking for work and those looking for workers (Backhaus, 2003).

In the framework of this theory, the wages of labour are therefore management control mechanisms employed by owners of means of production over those who depend on their labour power (workers). These mechanisms further entrench the unequal relationship that is formalised by the employment contract (Spencer, 2008). From the radical perspective the dynamics of the labour market represent yet another aspect of the broader class division that characterises capitalist society and highlights the reasons why there is such wide segmentation in the labour market of many countries, echoing the dual market and segmentation theoretical approaches. What is important about the radical institutional theory is that it recognises that in a labour market the majority of the power is held by the organisations that employ, irrespective of state intervention and social activism or involvement of organisations such as trade unions.

Referring back to the context of the current study, the preceding analysis is particularly salient in relation to Saudi Arabia, because despite the State's introduction of quotas, and increases in education for females, there has remained a reluctance by many firms to hire increased numbers of females or even Saudi nationals (Booz and Co., 2010).

Although as Abu-Nasr (2013) notes, this situation is slowly changing. This reinforces the wider perspective of radical institutional theory regarding the influence of wider social and national factors on the workings of the labour market. In that respect, whilst the wider objectives of capitalist desires for control over employment and labour process may be the same, the manner and justification in the Saudi context differs from what prevails in most Western social context. While there is evidence of reluctance among employers (especially foreign corporations) to hire Saudi nationals, there is also evidence of reluctance on the part of Saudi nationals to work for private employers. Alhabshi, and Ghazali, (1994), for example, attributed some of the limited success of the Saudisation programme to the fact that Saudis generally consider public sector employment much more for prestigious and are therefore reluctant to take up private sector employment.

Crucially, however, a relatively stronger argument lies in the reluctance of private sector employers to hire Saudi national in general, but especially female employees is derived from interpretations of traditional and religious norms and teachings. In that regard, the Saudi context differs from Western context, like UK, significantly in the sense that separation of genders in almost all spheres of life, is enshrined in Saudi law (Yamani, 1996; Lacey, 1981, cited in Hamdan, 2005). Although there is evidence of uptake in female participation in the formal labour market, these religious and traditional restrictions continue to limit female access in terms of education and, by extension, employment (Hamdan, 2005). The Independent Newspaper put succulently in the story how “Saudi Arabia struggles to employ its most-educated women”. Profiling the story of Manar Saud, a 27 year Saudi lady who returned home after graduating with a Master’s degree from the University of Virginia, the paper wrote: “Saud is part of a rising generation of young Saudi women caught between a government spending billions to educate and employ them, and a deeply conservative religious society that fiercely resists women in the workplace” (The Independent).

The relevance of her story is that it captures the ambiguity and the potentially problematic consequence of the Saudi Arabia's education policy on the one hand, and social attitudes and, therefore, constraints on labour market policy on the other hand. The current study is unique in the sense that it is predicated on potentially problematic implications of high levels of educational attainment and exposure among women for the future of gender equality/inequality in employment in Saudi Arabia. The following section focuses on this contradiction as it applies to policy.

### **2.3.3 Education Policy and Labour Markets in Saudi Arabia**

In Saudi Arabia, the fundamental objective of educational policy is to ensure the effective delivery of education so that it meets “the religious, economic and social needs of the country and to eradicate illiteracy among Saudi adults” (SACM, 2012). In particular, the educational policy in Saudi Arabia “derives from the religion of Islam...and...is part of the state policy” (Ministry of Education, 2004). The Ministry of Education establishes the overall standards for the nation's educational system – both private and public – and also oversees special education for the disabled. In 2003, the government abolished the General Presidency for Girls' Education and the latter's functions were taken over by the Ministry so that it could administer both girls' schools and colleges, as well as supervise kindergartens and nursery schools and sponsor literacy program for females to encourage early development and participation in society of educated women (Wang, 2013).

The Saudi Arabian educational policy is embodied in a document called “The Educational Policy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia” and provides that Muslim women are “entitled to education commensurate with their natural inclinations, and on equal footing with men” (Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 6), an approach which according to Welsh *et al.* (2013) is beginning to show results.

Despite these indications and the commitment of the State, the Ministry of Education concedes that it is faced with four major challenges in terms of education. Specifically, the increasing population of students; the creation of development plans that “will meet the economics of knowledge” globalization, particularly in interacting with world culture; and, utilizing education so that the youth are protected in terms of security as well as technological and cultural dangers (Ministry of Education, 2004; Pavan, 2013).

With these approaches, as noted in the Arab Human Development Report (2005), enrolment by females in university courses has risen although the courses taken remain focused in fields such as literature, humanities and social sciences. In the labour market these are the least demanded skills, unlike engineering and science which have low levels of female enrolment but high demand in the labour market (De Bel-Air, 2014). This is despite the indications (Arab Development Report, 2005) that girls are outperforming boys academically, with much lower drop-out rates, despite family and society bias towards a female role based around home and family.

In light of these thrusts and despite the challenges being faced socially and culturally, education in Saudi Arabia is an area in which women have experienced considerable progress in recent years (Fergany et al., 2003). The government has gone to great lengths to ensure that girls have greater access to education and to reduce gender gaps in the different educational levels. Women’s education in Saudi Arabia has generated a number of positive social developments, such as lower fertility and mortality rates, enhanced nutrition and health and even increased participation in the labour force, although not to the levels desired by either females or the State (Almobaireek and Manolova, 2013).

Nevertheless, as pointed out earlier, lingering social norms, local traditions as well as the structure “of the system of public education have been constraints on women’s realization of their equal opportunities in society and their full participation in the labour market” (Booz & Co., 2010, p. 1).

Consequently, the increased spending on public education, has not translated into commensurate outcomes in terms of educational attainment and labour market participation both in terms of numbers and levels. Instead, increased investment has led to proliferation in the number of schools, with the unintended consequence of compromising the quality of skills development. Educational reform in Saudi Arabia, as noted extensively in the background to the country, was focused less on teaching which entrenches traditional values and norms which are consistent with traditional Saudi society, than the structural changes which will challenge those traditions (Booz & Co. 2010) which resulted in the current skills gap in the labour market, but also the six-fold increase in female attainment and enrolment in education, particularly higher education, between 1997 and 2011 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012).

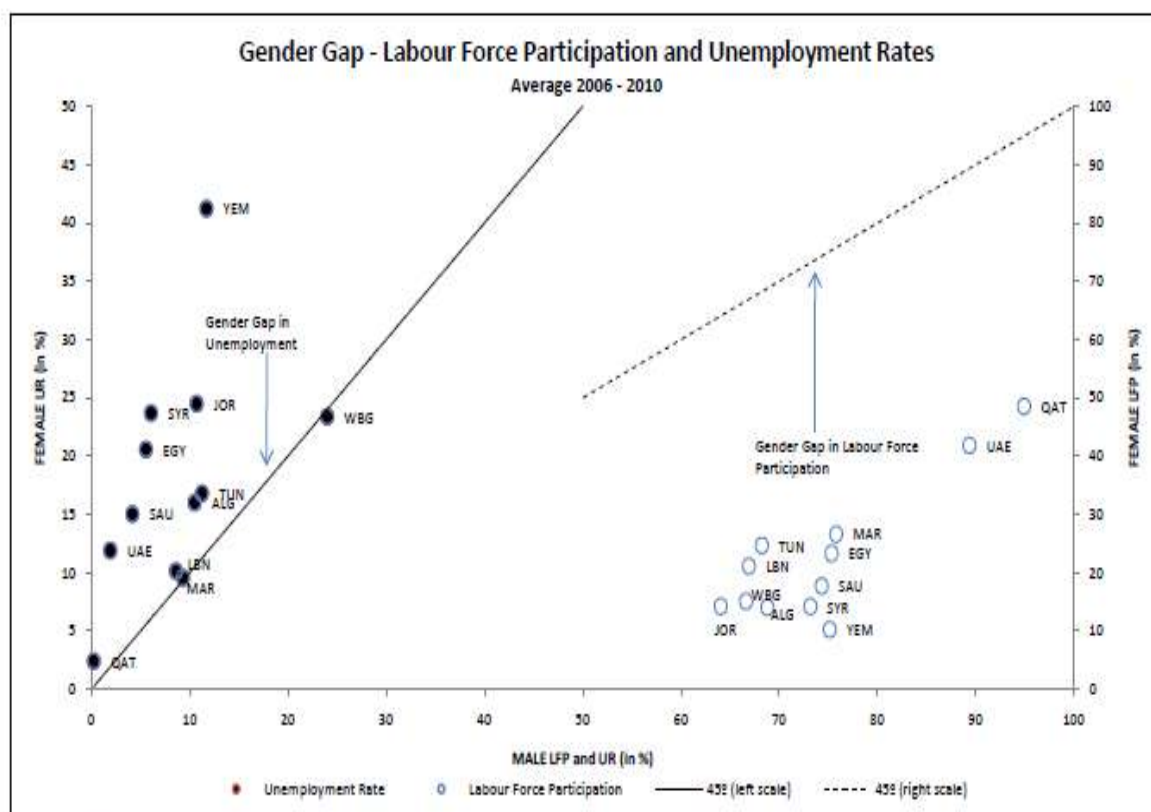
Part of the difficulty with female education, according to Hamdan (2005), is the fact that until 2002 the control of female education was under the guidance of the Department of Religious Guidance rather than the Ministry of Education as this was thought to be more fitting given the religious view of education for females. As a result, the quality of the education was grounded in observance of the views of right wing religious individuals. However, following the General Presidency for Girls Education and Ministry of Education were amalgamated in 2002 following an incident where religious conformity prevented firemen from rescuing females in a burning school (Hamdan 2005).



Since this time, the focus on girls' education has been less on ensuring they were ready to be wives, mothers, nurses and teachers and more on encouraging them to learn skills that can remove the skills gap in the labour market for nationals.

The difficulty in this respect for both State and females wishing to increase their education and qualification is the balance between specialisations and between tradition and the demands for the productive participation of women in society (Booz & Co., 2010). A further difficulty is the reluctance to accept women into the labour market in a more cohesive way in the country due to the traditionally accepted roles that women have had in the country. This is reflected in the high gender gap in employment noted by ILO (2011) and indicated in figure 2.18. As the figure indicates, there is not only a high gender gap but high disparity between male and female employment levels in Saudi Arabia, which is reflected in most of the other Arab nations.

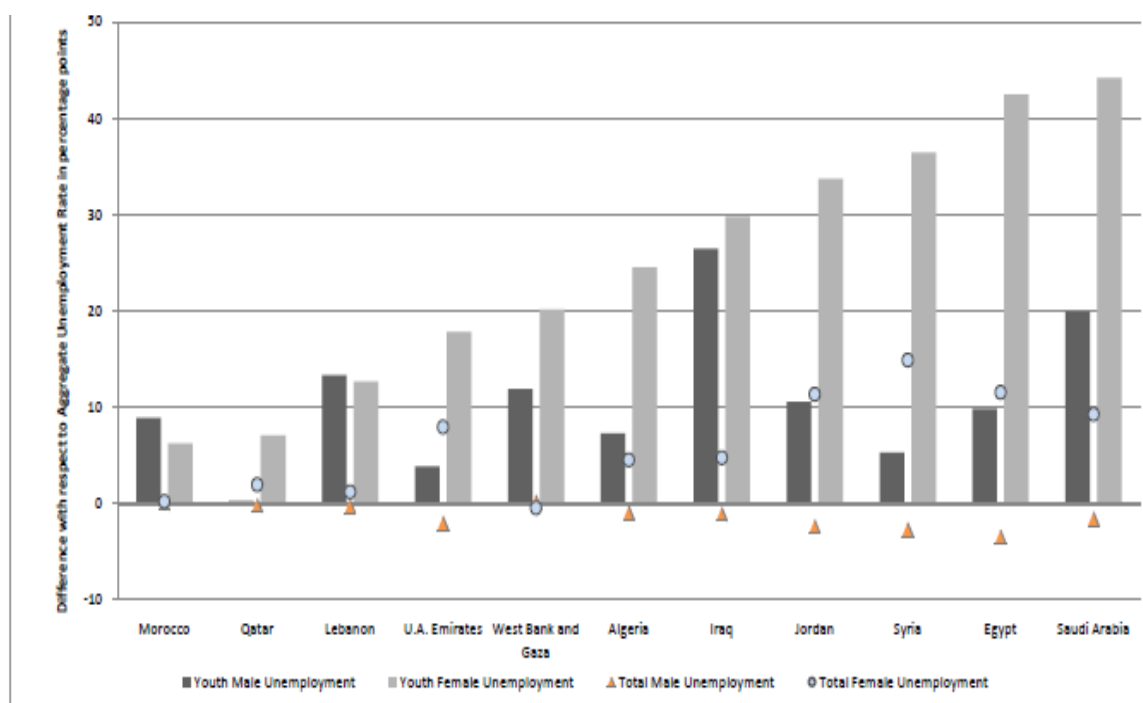
Figure 2.18: Gender Gap in Employment in Arab Nations



Source: ILO (2011).

As the chart further indicates, in relation to other Middle Eastern countries, Saudi Arabia has a much higher gender gap than others, underscoring the scale of the issues and problems facing the government and private companies in relation to encouraging female graduate participation in the labour market. However, the changes in the education system have meant that there has been some demographic change within the labour market overall in the country, although the situation for young female graduates entering the labour market is not encouraging, as Figure 2.19 indicates.

FIGURE 2.19: YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT BY GENDER IN ARAB NATIONS



Source: ILO (2011)

The Saudi female unemployment rate is the highest among Arab nations, as Figure 2.20 indicates. Whilst the male rate is high in comparison it is not the highest for the Middle East but still further underscores the issues faced by the government in increasing Saudi nationals' participation in the labour market. This is further indicated by figure 2.20, which shows the quarterly unemployment levels of both Saudis and non-Saudis by gender.

However, it is worth noting that these are official government figures and, therefore, may not be entirely accurate estimations of the reality of the unemployment situation.

FIGURE 2.20: UNEMPLOYMENT RATES BY GENDER

معدل البطالة ربع السنوي (15 سنة فأكثر) حسب الجنس  
Quarterly Unemployment Rates (15 years and Above) by Sex

		Total <span>الجملة</span>			Non_Saudi <span>غير سعودي</span>			Saudi <span>سعودي</span>				
		جملة	إناث	ذكور	جملة	إناث	ذكور	جملة	إناث	ذكور		
		Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male		
2012	First Quarter	6.7	19.8	3.2	0.6	0.9	0.4	12.2	34.0	6.9	الربع الأول	2012
	Second Quarter	6.8	20.8	2.8	0.2	0.3	0.2	12.1	35.1	6.4	الربع الثاني	
	Third Quarter	6.6	21.3	2.7	0.1	0.1	0.1	12.1	35.7	6.1	الربع الثالث	
	Fourth Quarter	6.4	21.2	2.6	0.1	0.2	0.1	12.0	35.7	6.0	الربع الرابع	
2013	First Quarter	6.8	22.1	2.9	0.4	1.7	0.2	12.0	34.8	6.3	الربع الأول	2013
	Second Quarter	6.7	21.4	2.8	0.3	1.1	0.2	11.8	34.0	6.2	الربع الثاني	
	Third Quarter	6.8	20.7	2.8	0.2	0.6	0.1	11.7	33.2	6.1	الربع الثالث	
	Fourth Quarter	6.6	20.1	2.8	0.2	0.6	0.1	11.6	32.1	6.1	الربع الرابع	

Source: CDSI (2013)

As Figure 2.20 indicates, the female unemployment levels for young educated women stayed in the region of 30-38% between 2012 and 2013 whilst male employment was nearly two thirds less, a comparison that is further marked by the small gap between non-Saudi gender unemployment figures. What is also of concern in relation to this study is the fact that 11.3% of graduates in the country are unemployed, as indicated by Figure 2.21. This suggests that there is a high level of skills within the national labour force that are not achieving entry to the labour market. However, it does indicate that there is an untapped market of talent for Saudi companies which would aid in the Saudisation programme if ways could be found to encourage their entry into employment.

FIGURE 2.21: UNEMPLOYMENT LEVELS BY EDUCATION LEVEL

Level/Country	Jordan	Lebanon	Morocco	Qatar	Saudi Arabia	Syria	Algeria	Tunisia	W. Bank and Gaza
Less than basic	7.6	5.0	2.1	0.1	0.4	7.3	1.9	5.7	23.1
Basic	11.5	8.8	11.1	0.2	2.6	6.0	7.6	9.2	27.2
Intermediate	8.3	9.7	18.3	0.6	7.3	17.1	8.9	13.7	23.6
Advanced	15.1	11.1	17.8	0.4	11.3	11.9	20.3	22.9	24.8
Total	12.5	9.0	9.1	0.3	5.4	8.4	10.0	13.0	23.7

Source: ILO, (2011).

Despite this evidence, the Saudi Government has continued to invest in education not only at home, but also through provision of funding for Saudi nationals to pursue higher education abroad. The latter is particularly evident in the increasing number of Saudi females who are attaining higher degree qualifications in Western universities including universities in the UK. Yet, the data presented here also indicates significant discrepancy between rate of educational attainment for women and their labour market presence. To address the discrepancy between increase in educational attainment and what appear to be structurally high levels of youth employment (IMF, 2014), the government of Saudi Arabia intervened into the labour market by legislating an indigenisation process of Saudisation (Alsheikh, 2015; Gonzalez et al., 2008).

### 2.3.4 Saudisation: addressing The Labour Market Problem

The Saudisation agenda in relation to the labour market centres on the argument for employment policy and practice to focus on the employment needs of Saudi citizens. The rationale is that foreign workers lack the practical background and familiarity due to variation in the education and training systems in their various countries.

As Ramady (2010) notes, in terms of comparative characteristics, foreign workers are paid less on the grounds that a vast majority of them come from low income economies and very high levels of supply of such labour requires lower wage levels.

Also, unlike Saudi nationals, foreign workers are open to taking up employment in almost any part of the country in accordance with their contract and the desire of the employer. This is considered a plus, because transferring a Saudi citizen from one area to another requires a lot of effort. It is also easier to terminate the contract of foreign labour; whereas Royal decree 21 of 1969 makes it very difficult to terminate the contract of a Saudi national. Although local labour ensures some stability, as pointed out in the preceding chapter with reference to the 2005 UNDP study, it is also more expensive both in terms of direct and indirect.

It is little wonder then that the statistics that are the basis for the Saudisation agenda show that as at 1982, 66.5% of educated Saudi citizens with university qualifications were active in labour market compared to about 70.1% of educated non-Saudi citizens: a situation that has only marginally improved. There have been rising levels of female unemployment since 2001, which highlights firstly the higher numbers of women within the labour market, but also the difficulties they are experiencing in gaining entry, even with improved access to education and qualifications. These figures confirm those already highlighted regarding the levels of youth and particularly female participation in the Saudi labour market. The fact that the figure is increasing does indicate the improvements in the education system but also illustrates the fact that whilst females are being given the qualifications and education to participate, their entry to the labour market is being hampered.

Many of the difficulties are focused around access, and social and cultural barriers in relation to the kinds of work that women can take on in the country. However, there are moves to begin changing these with government initiatives and support to encourage women into both the private and public sector. The Government and the ruling family support all these initiatives.

Additionally, the aims and efforts of numerous women's groups within the country promote and support greater engagement of Saudi women within the labour market. The difference is more marked among educated females, where 67.5% of Saudis compared with almost 87% of foreigners. Government data also shows that only 14.3% of Saudi national are employed in scientific and vocational professions compared to 13.1% of foreign labour. In terms of working hours, foreign workers, on average, work 50.2 hours a week compared to 43.2 hours for Saudi workers. Demographically, the average age of Saudi worker is 34.8 for men and 26 for women. For foreign workers the numbers are 33.1 for men and 32.6 for women. In terms of sector, there is not much difference. However, the differences become more marked when one compares the positions generally held by foreigners and those by Saudi citizens (UNDP, 2005a).

The dual labour market issues that are at the heart of the Saudisation agenda relate to the concerns about the use and management of migrant labour and its implications for the employment issues of the state's own citizens. This manifests itself in the labour market behaviours of both employers (private more so than public sector) and, the potential employees in terms of Saudi citizens (Alhabshi and Ghazali, 1994). As policy intervention, Saudisation seems to derive from the perception that unemployment among Saudi nationals is caused by migrant workers and the reluctance of foreign private sector organisation to hire Saudi citizens. In that respect, little, if any consideration is given to the facts that generally, Saudi citizens prefer public to private sector employment and, the reliance of the Saudi economy on migrant labour. If anything, the careful management of the dilemma of the need for migrant labour and potentially adverse consequences of the implications of such labour for social stability is the major concern of Saudi public policy relating to the labour market.

Empirical evidence on migrant labour suggests that migrant workers are not considered to be in competition with local labour in the labour market, so long as the skill composition of the former is different to that of the local labour force. In that case, migrant labour provides complementary status that addresses any skills gaps or refusal of locals (citizens) to do certain jobs or work in certain geographical areas (Piore 1979; Borjas, 1994). As the preceding sections show, the situation in Saudi Arabia does not conform to this perceived general wisdom.

Although sufficient evidence may not exist about how migrant labour has impacted the employment opportunities of Saudi nationals, the developments plans since 1990 have outlined and emphasised the Saudi government's desire to limit employment of non-Saudi workers from the labour market and, as much as possible, substitute them with Saudi nationals across occupations and sectors. This agenda, however, was also driven by economic imperatives that require some reform and redirection of economic strategy. Unlike the 1970s and 1980s, when employment policy aimed at increasing the supply of skilled Saudi labour with incentives including better remuneration, generous work privileges, and facilities superior to the private sector (Al-Towaijri, 1992). The government has reversed that policy since the 1990s, with recruitment within the public sector being limited mainly to education and health sector and a freeze in employment in most other sectors. This resulted in conspicuously rising unemployment among Saudi citizens with a 13.4%, the first such rate since the discovery of oil in the 1930s (Mellahi and Wood, 2002). The potential consequences of the social unrest that could arise if this pattern continues, provides the most robust explanation for the Saudisation of the Saudi Arabian labour market.

A further factor is the collaboration between the Saudi government and the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) which works to develop policies to encourage economic and social advancement in all countries. In respect to Saudi Arabia, it is the only OPEC country that is part of the G20 group who collaborate with OECD on policy.

Since public sector employment is largely frozen, the government has had to turn to the private sector to implement its agenda. The private sector was either coerced or enticed to adopt these policies and recruit among Saudi nationals. The policy was first implemented in the 1980s in the public enterprise sector (public corporations) that dominate the Saudi economy as a way of getting rid of high ranking foreign workers in these institutions and replacing them with Saudi nationals (Woodward, 1988). The second phase of Saudisation of the labour market began with yet another Development plan in the 1990s. As Taha (2012) notes, the intent is to raise the number of Saudi nationals in private firms. To achieve this there are on-going campaigns where companies who have made adjustments and removed obstacles to nationalisation through innovations are used as examples for other firms. In addition, there are incentives for private firms to encourage their recruitment of Saudi nationals but also to encourage increased training and development across all demographics, which would include female graduates.

This second phase is an adaption and evolution of the original focus which was based in limiting migrant workers and increasing Saudi nationals' employment across all sectors. Quotas were set in 1994 for companies to increase their Saudi employees by 5 per year with penalties for non-compliance. As part of this as Ramady (2013) notes, companies are colour coded under the Nitaqat scheme which indicates what quota of Saudi nationals they should be employing and the degree to which they are complying with that requirement (Alsheikh, 2015; Table 2.2).



The Nitaqat, which the latest update of the Saudisation programme is “designed to boost the Saudis’ share of private sector employment opportunities’ that does not only indicate the quota requirements of individual companies, but also ‘evaluates private sector entities based on their nationalisation” (Alsheikh, 2015, p. 5).

TABLE 2.2: NITAQAT OUTPUT

Entities achieving an excellent quota performance with the highest percentage of national recruitment	Entities achieving a good quota performance with a good percentage of nationalisation
Entities achieving below an average performance with a low percentage of Saudization	Non-compliant entities

Source: Alsheikh (2015, p 5)

The colour indicate the level of compliance, which is “calculated using a moving average basis over a successive period of 26 weeks, with the number of Saudi workers registered with the Kingdom’s national insurance scheme (GOSI)” (ibid, p.6). In terms of targets, Nitaqat differs from the initial Saudisation programme in the sense that minimum and maximum targets are set based on enterprise size and nature of economic activity. The table 2.3 gives some indication of these targets based on size.

TABLE 2.3: TARGET BASED ON COMPANY SIZE

Number of employees	Size	Saudization requirement
1 - 9	Micro Enterprise	Exempt from Nitaqat
10 - 49	Small	5 - 24%
50 - 499	Medium	6 - 27%
500 - 2,999	Large	7 - 30%
+ 3,000	Big	8 - 30%

Nitaqat Saudisation requirements base on enterprise size (ibid)

In terms of areas of economic activity, 52 categories are recognised under the programme and enterprises in each category are divided according size and allocated targets. Overall, reports indicate that 87% of the 1,979,103 enterprises that were registered under the programme in 2012, are exempted and only 1% of the 13% that required to comply have attained the blue code of excellent (ibid). These data suggest that current policy is confronted with several challenges which need to be addressed in order for desired outcomes to be realised. The following subsection explores some of these challenges.

### **2.3.5 Challenges to Saudisation**

Against this background, the biggest challenge to the programme of Saudisation has been Saudi Arabia's desire for membership of international economic and trading organisations like the WTO and its predecessor, GATT. The international mobility of labour, with the right of the private organisations to recruit, select and move workers in response to market demands, is a core element of both the WTO and GATT frameworks and Saudi Arabia's desire for WTO accession is therefore, in direct conflict with the Saudisation agenda (Niessen, 2000). The question therefore for Saudi Arabia is how to reconcile the restrictive policies of the Saudisation agenda with the trade and labour market liberalisation and globalisation agenda of WTO. In this context there needs to be collaboration between the various state and commercial labour market institutions.

As such, understanding the role of HRM in relation to these institutions is an integral part of evaluating the potential application and benefit of flexibility within working patterns in the country, particularly for educated young women in the Saudi labour market, and is an area that will be covered from the HRM perspective later in this work.

In addition, in the context of the labour market, there is currently a benefit for many firms to employ foreign nationals from a supply and demand perspective and the willingness of these individuals to integrate from a gender perspective and work at a global level which

can be difficult for Saudi nationals who are trying to reconcile their religious beliefs with the changing market demands in their country (Al-Asfour and Khan, 2013). For the government, the challenge is to ensure that the benefits of employing Saudi nationals are greater, potentially through higher costs for expatriate workers, difficulties with visas and worker mobility and requirements from organisations that all approaches to local labour pools have been exhausted. This challenge is potentially the largest as it relies on private and public organisations recognising the value of the Saudi national labour force, and specifically the educated women with this and seeing them as a viable and preferable alternative to foreign nationals (Khan and Varshney, 2013). The other challenge is that currently local people and especially women will set up businesses with foreign nationals to support their development and access to finance. Therefore, the government may need to evaluate how best to encourage female entrepreneurship amongst educated females, who in turn can employ other females and thus contribute to the economy and reduce unemployment levels in these group (Al-Ahmadi, 2011).

To meet these challenges there must be measurement and regulation of the labour markets to evaluate trends and patterns and then strategies developed to be able to deal with these. In the specific context of female graduates therefore, there is the potential that new strategies, such as flexible working patterns may be the way forward, and be a valid HRM goal in the country.

The report on the performance of the Nitaqat programme suggests that these challenges are enduring and having adverse impact on the performance of the Saudisation policy and the nature of failure as outlined in the next section, suggests that it can be attributed to a number of factors. The solutions to the challenges also require identification of factors, including both institutional and individual, that account for current policy failure.

### **Failures of Saudisation: Who Is to Blame?**

The role of women, particularly as education opportunities have increased, has been the subject of a number of studies, which have observed small changes being made to both governmental and societal attitude to females within the workplace over the last twenty years (Al-Bakr, 1990, Kattan, 1991, Flynn, 2011; Rutledge *et al.*, 2011). These studies have generally noted that whilst female access to education is a core aim of the Saudi government, it has raised questions about the place of women in society.

For example, if a woman chooses to follow an educational path rather than the traditional route of marriage and children then she faces the potential of being left with minimal choices in terms of a husband, as Saudi society has traditionally been focused on early marriage and support for a husband by the wife. As Kattan (1991) notes, this situation has meant that for many educated Saudi women there is a potential there will be no males of the right age and educational achievement for them to meet.

Whilst perceptions of those outside the country could lead to factors such as these not being considered a challenging issue, in the highly family based, patriarchal family values in Saudi, this can potentially preclude women from opting to benefit from their education by entering the labour market. This is further compounded by the restrictions placed on employment locations and professions for Saudi women based in the cultural and religious values of the country.

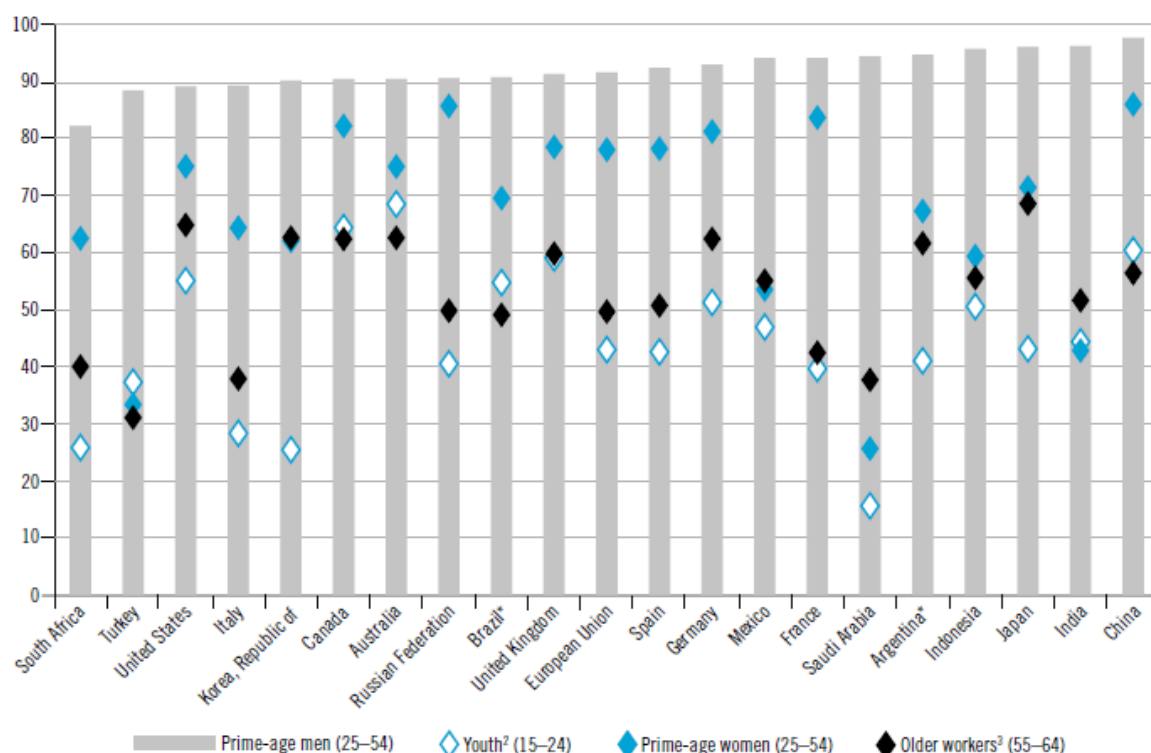
Whilst the government consistently reaffirms its commitment to utilising the potential of female graduates, its approach to policies in this regard has been heavily influenced by recognition of these factors and the fact that reducing discriminatory policies will potentially be received negatively by conservative Saudis and religious leaders. For this reason, gradual expansion has been the approach.

There are, according to Kattan (1991), three main trends in women's employment in the Kingdom and in the Gulf states in general:

- a) Women's work should be limited to the home, i.e. raising children and supporting their husband;
- b) Women can work, and have a right to do so, provided the jobs are not contradictory to either the feminine nature or Islam, for example education or medicine; and
- c) Women have equal rights and thus responsibilities and should be able to work in any field to serve their country. This final view recognises the importance of ensuring that educated women are supporting the development of their country.

These three perspectives have affected all the policies that have been developed by the government, who, as mentioned, recognises the benefit of a female, particularly a graduate female workforce, but wishes to conserve the religious and social values of the country yet, at the same ensure that the Kingdom remains competitive in the world economy. These elements therefore have consequently affected the overall Saudisation agenda of the government and its approach to increasing opportunities for female graduates in particular which, as Figure 2.22 indicates, has not greatly reduced the ratio of male to female participation within the labour market.

FIGURE 2.22: LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATES



Source: ILO, (2012)

### 2.3.6 Saudi Labour Market

Despite similarities with many developing economies, the Saudi Arabian labour market also exhibits differences from these, including some in the Arabian Gulf and the Middle East in general. This does not mean that there are no comparative similarities between the Saudi labour market and indeed their economy in general, and other Middle Eastern Countries, particularly those who in who belong to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). These countries, which include Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE, share some common economic and therefore labour market characteristics, as noted by Hertog (2012).

These include significant dependence on petroleum and petroleum products, relatively little pressures from the general population on labour market issues, institutional constraints on labour market participation (especially for women), and a relatively significant reliance on migrant labour (Mellahi and Wood, 2002, 2005; Mellahi, 2000; IPA, 1999).

These general factors all impact on the evolution of both the external and internal labour markets and are further influenced by the high presence of MNC (Multi-national corporations) within the country. There are however, some specific issues that need to be explored in the context of Saudi Arabia.

Like all the members of the GCC, the Saudi economy is dependent on oil, which accounts for between 90-95% of the country's export earnings and state owned enterprises (monopolies) are the dominant economic actors. The Saudi labour market, like the overall economy, has not always depended on oil and oil products and this is also reflected in the employment concerns of Saudi Arabia. Before the discovery of oil in 1933, the Saudi Arabian economy relied mainly on trade, which included the provision of services for the millions of pilgrims who visit Mecca and Medina annually as well as date plantation farming in the Eastern regions of Al Ahsa, Al Hasa, and Ash Sharqiyah, but these are all now over-shadowed by the dominance of the oil industry in the country.

The Saudi Arabian Ministry of Economic Planning (UNDP, 2005b) described the Saudi labour market as historically manifesting six major characteristics. First, the labour force showed a declining labour market participation of Saudi citizens. This is supported by data that shows a decline in percentage of Saudi citizens in the total labour force from 76.8% of the total labour force in 1974 to 34.3% in 1982. Despite the very low labour market participation of Saudi citizens (25% in 1975 and 31% in 1977), the report claims there was very little pressure from the citizens or the government to change this and that constraints on female labour market participation remain particularly low at 4.5% in 1974 and declining further to 1.8% in 1982.

The second characteristic was the lack of vocational skills and the inability of the country, at the time, to generate adequate supply of the requisite skills.

Third, there has been significant change in the type of skills needed in the labour market as a result of the very rapid changes in national economic strategy and objectives. These have been changed within some years not only to meet standards of living, but also to increase welfare level by creating a variety in national income resources for the long term. Four, institutional and organisational weaknesses that made it difficult to cope with constant labour mobility and shifts in demand and supply.

The fifth and sixth characteristics fit into the migrant character of the labour force and labour market participation. In that regard, although the labour market data suggests increased ratios of Saudisation in some stages, it also shows that this is not in the areas that indicate real transfer of skills and knowledge related to flexible technology. Finally, the labour market shows dual Saudi characteristics, which in recent years, manifests itself not only in the form of labour market for citizens and a labour market for foreign labour, but also in the existence of a labour market for the private sector and a labour market for the public sector. Each market has its unique characteristics and dynamics as well as advantages and disadvantages (MEP, 2009). In any case, the duality of the labour market, especially in terms of citizens and non-citizen labour markets has been a major concern of the government of Saudi Arabia and the focus of the Saudisation agenda outlined in the 8<sup>th</sup> Development Plan (2005-2009).

At least 90% of the female workforce in the country holds a university degree or secondary qualification (Booz & Co., 2010). In 2006, at least 57% of all the university graduates in the country were females and this increasing level of educational attainment is a major determinant of heightening participation of women in the labour market. However, it must be noted that attaining a degree does not automatically translate into employment or even participation in the labour market.



As Baki (2004) indicates, the nature of the Saudi education system with its segregated learning not only under-prepares both genders for the global workplace but also places pressure on the government's ability to achieve its Saudisation aims. This has led to the situation, noted in records released by the Deputy Labour Minister, which indicate that the majority of unemployed women are highly qualified with at least 78.3% of them being university graduates (Booz & Co., 2010). In contrast, 76% of unemployed men only have a secondary education or even lower. This means to say that the national system of education is not able to appropriately prepare women for competitive roles in the labour market – even at the highest levels. Another noteworthy statistic is that more than 1,000 of the unemployed women in Saudi Arabia have doctorates (Booz & Co., 2010).

As a result of this phenomenon, these highly qualified women are relegated to such conventional jobs as teaching or working in service businesses. This is further compounded by societal, cultural and religious values that are potential barriers to women participating fully in the entire Saudi labour market. As Weidman and Jacobs (2011) notes, women are not permitted to work in engineering or veterinary sciences as these are seen as unfeminine professions. As a result the access to the labour market experienced by women is not positive. Furthermore, Flynn (2011) notes, women in the country are maximising the educational opportunities being offered by the government but then find themselves frustrated in terms of the labour market, being relegated to either service industries or public administration roles, rather than contributing their advanced skills to replacing expatriate workers in the market place. This is despite the highly publicised Saudisation agenda of the government which to some extent is hampered by the way the labour market is measured and regulated.

Some of the reasons for this are the traditional roles of women within Saudi society, despite state assurances that educated women have a role to play in the economy.

The difficulty is that Saudi women must, irrespective of their education or social position, obtain permission from their male guardians to work, study, marry or even receive medical treatment (Andersson and Togelius, 2011). In addition, the gender segregation, which is integral to the culture, can be seen as a major barrier to meaningful participation in society and building of the economy. Unlawful mixing between sexes can lead to arrest and criminal charges brought by the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, with women receiving much harsher punishments than men (Fisher, 2012).

Even if a woman achieves academic qualification that provide her with the skills required by the labour market, the Saudi labour code, brought in 2006, underlines the Sharia code that women should only work in fields suitable to their nature. In both public and private organisations women must have permission from male guardians, and this permission can be revoked at any time. Even in the widening sphere of jobs in clothing, food preparation or banking, where permission has been relaxed, strict gender segregation is enforced (Sadi and Al-Ghazali, 2012).

However, as Le Renard (2013) notes, wider access to technology and education is encouraging young women to push for changes in these roles and provide them with a wider role within society, including the opening of female run law firms (RT News, 2014), and agencies which offer levels of segregation within the working environment to accommodate the wishes of young Saudi female graduates and other workers. The role of women, particularly graduates, and their increasing potential within the Saudi labour market therefore deserves further specific attention particularly in regard to the issues they face, some of which have been highlighted above.

A holistic analysis and understanding of the employment situation among Saudi female graduates as an aspect of the wider labour market issues of Saudi Arabia requires that these phenomena be viewed against the theoretical debates about the nature of the external labour market.

Following from Murphy's (2011) analysis, figuring how to effectively manage and incorporate the female human resource into the Kingdom's pool of labour supply, will contribute significantly to the social and economic viability of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, however, the figures highlighted above relating to the levels of participation in the labour market suggest that this is not occurring in the country, with female participation being one of the lowest globally. To understand why this is and provide a clearer background, the next section briefly looks at the demographic characteristics of the Saudi market., followed by a section that gives an overview of some of the potential factors that may impact on how female can access the labour market.

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#### 2.4 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAUDI MARKET

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Comparatively, female labour market participation in Saudi Arabia remains relatively insignificant, as was highlighted earlier. To provide a clear comparison, female employment in Saudi Arabia makes up slightly over 15 % of the total labour force, whilst in Britain the figure is nearly three times this at 46% of the total labour force (NationMaster, 2012). In global terms, Saudi Arabia is 180th compare to 51st for the United Kingdom (ibid). While the data on female labour market participation may appear insignificant, the trend and, therefore, the trajectory of female labour market participation suggests that Saudi Arabia must brace itself for the inevitable consequences and HRM strategies and policies necessary to adequately deal with increase female labour market participation.

Whilst this is one aim of the Saudisation programme, as alluded to in sub-section 2.1.4 and section 2.3 (pp. 78-83), and the intent of the monarchy and government to increase employment opportunities for nationals, including females, there remain difficulties to overcome, highlighted by the cultural and historical background of the country identified in the Background section.

Since the discovery of oil in the 1930s, but especially in recent years, Saudi Arabia has made significant investments in developing its human resources. This has included provision of higher education for her citizens including women in both Saudi Arabia and abroad, particularly in Western higher education institutions in both the United States and Britain. The increase in female participation in higher education (many of them studying abroad) creates opportunities, but also employment problems for the Kingdom that can be seen as similar to some of the problems currently faced by the UK labour market, particularly in relation to graduate employment and initial entry to the labour market. Thus, as already indicated, there is a suggestion that the evolution of human resources management strategies and state intervention working together must necessarily include flexible employment practices that will show some similarity to those utilised in the UK, but with a recognition of the differences in social context between women in the labour markets of the two countries (Rubery and Grimshaw, 2003).

The implications of the differences in the social context within which the labour market in which Saudi and UK women respectively participate forms the core basis of this research and thesis. As identified by Patterson (2013), the traditional role of women in Saudi society from an economic perspective was informal support in the agricultural industry. However, as the country has developed and its economic infrastructure has evolved to incorporate multi-nationals, this role was first removed and then replaced with a focus on home and family.

However, with the recognition of the value that educated women could provide in a variety of sectors, the educational reforms highlighted already have attempted to redefine the role of women, and particularly graduates, in an economic context and encourage them to participate more fully in the labour market (Moghadam, 2013).

The difficulties highlighted thus far with this, related to cultural variations, access to job roles and the potential reluctance of smaller and medium sized firms to make the necessary adaptations to the working environment to accommodate the changing role of women graduates within the Saudi economy (Hunter and Salam, 2013). This is despite the recognised need to encourage their entry into the labour market (Allam, 2012).

In light of the aim of the study, which is to investigate current practice in Saudi Arabia in relation to the evident increase in female labour market participation, research and analysis of employment decisions by large companies, especially regarding the employment of women graduates and flexibility of employment, are pertinent. Therefore, such research, and especially the literature regarding how the UK's deals with these issues, are relevant to understanding the factors which impact on labour market flexibility, allows more understanding of labour market regulations. The next section explores this literature and debate.

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## 2.5 LABOUR MARKET REGULATIONS AND MEASUREMENT

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Regulations imposed by the Ministry of the Interior or the Labour Department dictate that non-Saudi workers cannot enter the country unless they are sponsored by a legitimate employer, or by a Saudi household as domestic workers (TDAP, 2011). When a foreign worker enters Saudi Arabia, they have to obtain a residency card or an *Iqama*, as well as a work permit.

As soon as they get their *Iqama* card, they are required to surrender their passport to their sponsor and retrieve it when they depart from the country because the *Iqama* can function as their main identification card while in Saudi Arabia. A foreign worker cannot switch sponsor unless they obtain a release from their original sponsor. These regulations are applicable to foreign workers in both the public and private sectors.

Through this process, the residency regulation distorts the labour market and eliminates non-Saudi workers from the labour demand and supply to match their opportunity in the labour market while their Saudi counterparts are able to move freely in the market. The intent, which is consistent with the goals of the Saudisation programme, is that the Saudi workers thus have more freedom to take up posts and that foreign nationals are restricted to their initial sponsor unless they go through a very complex bureaucratic process. In this way the government restricts the flexibility of the foreign worker but with the intent of increasing that of the Saudi worker through mobility.

Foreign workers in professional, managerial and technical occupations who have post-secondary education have the right to bring their families with them to Saudi Arabia, while workers who have lower level of education can bring their families only for visits. Hence, this policy creates a sub-segment among workers in the secondary labour markets when viewed in the context of internal labour market theory, because it gives certain non-Saudis workers some financial benefits that are not enjoyed by other disadvantaged workers because they do not fall into the required category of worker, or lack requisite educational and/or professional qualifications (TDAP, 2011). Meanwhile, Saudi Labour Law governs commercial government corporations and the private sector.

The labour law grounds employment in these firms to personal contracts between workers and employers. This means that there could be separate work relations and conditions among employees in the same jobs and the same workplace. Saudi Labour Law also entitles the employer to punish or fire a worker for several reasons without due process, although the Civil Service does provides recourse for workers against any punishment meted out without due process (TDAP, 2011).

In Saudi Arabia, there is no known effective labour court and this is one of the important elements that negatively impacts on employment security in the country. In addition to this, Saudi Arabia has no adequate measures that identify wage rates such as salary scales or any other form of personal or productivity characteristics like experience, education or any other requirement within the private sector as is seen in western countries. The public sector however does have these mechanisms, which underscores the desire of Saudi nationals to work for public rather than private companies as they perceive a higher level of security and personal benefit can be achieved in the public sector.

Based on information gathered by the World Bank, the Difficulty Redundancy Index (DRI) in Saudi Arabia is very low (Angel-Urdinola and Kuddo, 2012). The DRI measures the extent to which regulation requires notifications or justifications for dismissal, approval requirements for dismissing an employee; any stipulated obligations to retrain and/or re-assign workers after termination and other priority rules for redundancy or re-employment. However, even if there are no such requirements in place, employers are required to notify the Ministry of Labour before a worker is terminated. Usually, the reason for this is to prevent employees from not signing a dismissal notice. As mentioned earlier, despite the fact that legislation requires the establishment of a minimum wage system by the government, to date, no minimum wage has been implemented in Saudi Arabia. Instead, wages are agreed upon in the personal agreements between employer and worker.

In 2006, the Saudi Arabian government revised its labour code so that it is better able to adapt to international trade, to enhance labour mobility and to attract foreign direct investment (Angel-Urdinola *et al.*, 2012). According to the International Labour Organization and the World Bank, Saudi Arabia has a very low Employing Workers Index (EWI), which measures how flexible or rigid labour markets are. A low EWI generally means that the labour market is not flexible. To note, in this country, there are no limits to fixed term labour contracts. This is because usually, a contract that has been in force after three years is changed to an open-ended contract. The country also does not encourage overtime work, which can be viewed as another indication of its non-flexible labour market characteristics. To that end, and despite the fact that labour laws require 25 days' annual leave with pay, the Labour Department prohibits overtime work (Angel-Urdinola *et al.*, 2012).

There are two types of social security program applicable to employees, including the civil pension fund for government employees as well as pension and insurance for private sector employees (Mahdi, 2000). The Civil Pension Fund is exclusively for permanent, full-time and Saudi national government workers and is based on their job tenure and ages. The retirement pension is 2.5% of average monthly earnings in the last two years of contribution with the minimum pension at SAR 1,725 per month. The Pension and Social Insurance is for private sector workers and covers pension and work injuries. The General Organization runs this for Social Insurance (GOSI), which is a government institution. Based on GOSI regulations, pension and work injuries are applicable only to Saudi workers, while foreign workers are covered only by work injuries insurance. Moreover, foreign workers are entitled only to a "one-off compensation based on their job tenure" (Mahdi, 2000, p. 5). On 6<sup>th</sup> of May 2014 the Shoura Council decided to increase the retirement age of employees to 62 years (for males). Retirement age for females is still 55 years.



This chapter has presented and discussed the overall geography and culture of the country, combined with the state's Saudisation agenda. The Saudisation agenda has identified that for continued sustainable growth there needs to be a greater engagement of women in the labour market and that this needs to be supported by interventions, incentives and to some degree a change in overall attitudes about the roles that women can play in the Kingdom's society. This is backed up by the high levels of women achieving university qualifications, demonstrating their potential skills and thus value in the market, despite the low employment figures that exist for these groups. This is particularly pertinent as it appears that Saudi women seem to be surpassing Saudi males in succeeding through the educational system. However, due to laws governing segregation in the work place, employers are called upon to make concessions, adaptations and allowances to bring women in. For example, separate entrances need to be built. Similarly, washroom facilities for women need to be designed and built. Notwithstanding, flexibility is apparently a key intervention to actually assimilating the Saudi female into the workplace. Allowing Saudi women to work from home can do this. It is apparent, however, that far more could be done to redress the imbalance, particularly in light of seeking commitment from the Saudi female workforce as well as reaping the gains for a well-developed supply of Saudi human resources.

Having provided a clear indication of Saudi Arabia's background and its labour market, the chapter then provided a brief general review of the Saudi labour market, focusing on the ambiguity of education policy on the one hand, and, social attitudes and, therefore policy relating to female labour market participation on the other. In light of this contradiction and the core aims of the study, a key focus of the chapter concerned the core labour market intervention policy of the Saudi state in the form of Saudisation.

The concept is defined in terms of broad efforts at labour market indigenisation elsewhere around the world and in the GCC countries and, in that regard, it is argued that while these policies come in different guises, they have the common objective of giving employment priority to citizens. What makes Saudi Arabia and many of the GCC countries different is their relatively high level of reliance on foreign and migrant labour. In light of this reliance, but also adverse attitudes of Saudi citizens towards private sector employment, the chapter highlighted the various challenges and therefore limitations of the Saudisation policy both in general terms of addressing increasing unemployment among Saudi nationals, and in terms of failure as a credible solution to addressing unemployment among Saudi female graduates.

There is reference to labour market theory throughout the chapter, but merely for clarification and better understanding of the Saudi labour market and labour market policy in relation to other contexts. These theories are elaborated in greater detail and nuanced in the theory chapter which follows.

## CHAPTER 3 LITERATURE REVIEW I: LABOUR MARKETS

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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In order to develop an effective foundation for the investigation of factors affecting unemployment for Saudi female graduates, which according to OECD (2011) and the country's own CDSI (2013) is a major concern within the Kingdom, a review of existing viewpoints and theoretical frameworks in relation to the labour market in general, and specifically in the context of Saudi Arabia's approach to female education and graduate employment needs to be undertaken. This chapter thus considers theories of the labour market in light of attempts to apply them to the context of the Kingdom in the preceding chapter, as well as providing evaluation of the labour market in other areas of the world. This is because understanding how labour markets develop and evolve can provide some indications regarding how to deal with the concerns the government has in relation to high unemployment levels (G20 briefs, 2010).

Given this situation, the focus of this study is to examine labour markets both from a global perspective but with a specific reference to Saudi Arabia and, also if and to what extent these theories represent potential solutions to the concerns that exist within the country in regard to the employment of female graduates. The assumption for this is that the educational improvements and advances in the country have increased the number of women with a high level of education, and a desire to enter the market. In light of this social trend, but especially due to trends in unemployment among Saudi citizens, the government has focused on increasing the opportunities for Saudi nationals and increasing female participation in the labour market (CDSI, 2013), rather than the historical dependence on foreign labour.

These aims of increasing female participation and investing in female education, as discussed in the preceding chapter; make up part of the overall Government agenda of Saudisation. Yet, as Al-Waqfi and Forstenlechner (2014) highlight and, as also indicated in chapter 2, the agenda and desire to increase female participation within the marketplace is at odds with the strict Islamic and gender segregated nature of the country, which means that senior managers, employers and state organisations need to consider the adjustments that are required to encourage and keep more women in the labour market. These two factors have meant that the labour market in general, but especially, employment practices within the workplace, need to adjust and adapt to the potential issues in terms of recruitment, selection and opportunities to accommodate the higher numbers of both Saudi nationals and females into the formal labour market and also deal with conflicts of a cultural nature that may occur as a result of these changes, not least in terms of companies meeting the quota or “Nitaqat” for employment of Saudi nationals (Ramady, 2013) and the impact that this may have on the Saudi labour market.

As such, and to position the study in the global context of educated females’ access to the labour market, as well as that of KSA, this chapter thus considers a number of areas. The overall labour market per se is evaluated through application of competing theories and constructs, incorporating internal and external markets as well as the role and effect of the state in shaping and controlling these. This last is particularly important due to the high levels of state control exerted in KSA in the overall management of the labour market and its current key focus for Saudisation (Ramady, 2013).

Having evaluated all of these areas, and given that the primary research question for this work is the potential of flexible employment to deliver a viable solution to the concerns being raised regarding the Saudi Arabian employment market, consideration is also given to flexibility within the labour market.

This encompasses a review of what flexibility in the labour market means, how it impacts on and is influenced by HRM practices, cultural factors and overall market place situation, with a particular reference to the issues around Muslim women and flexible working within the Saudi market place, all of which are integral to the current study. In essence, this chapter aims to deliver a full background to the constructs of the labour market, both internal and external, in a global sense and more specifically within the Saudi Arabian labour market framework.

Essentially, the labour market is a market where labour, or more so labour power, is exchanged for a total remuneration package, which includes inter alia wages, holidays and pensions. Generally, the amount and types of remuneration are dictated by the quality and quantity of labour, which, from a neoclassical perspective (see following section), is determined by the supply and demand for labour, which in turn, are determined by the demand for the product that any particular labour produces (Lipsey and Chrystal, 1999, 2011). However, as argued later in the following sections, the labour market is also defined by the political and social interactions between the actors – employees, employers and the state. As a result, alternative, perhaps more plausible theories about the nature of the labour market and about the manner and consequences of labour market relations and interactions for the actors are advanced in terms of institutional and radical theories. Essentially, these theories define the labour market in terms of power and exploitation and institutional regulations that define the relative influence and outcome for the actors.

Consequently, within any labour market there are numerous differentials which exist, given as Lipsey and Chrystal (2011) note, the market is where people sell mental and physical effort for return in the form of wages and benefits, it is evident that there will be variation in the reward (pay differential), roles (job types differential) and skill (qualifications differential).

Therefore, from the perspective of an organisation, there is a need and desire to employ those with the best skills who will deliver value to the organisation. However, in the case of Saudi, the government desire for a reduction in reliance on foreign labour has meant that organisations must have a quotient of Saudi nationals in the work force, which can negatively impact on the ability to achieve this organisational goal.

As such, there are inputs from the workforce, organisations and state intervention which encompasses education, legislation and regulation (De Beer and Schils, 2009). A labour market can be identified on a regional or local, national or worldwide basis and as global organisations have spread, there has been an impact on local or internal markets in relation to pay, conditions, and other issues of employment, creating significant changes in the labour markets of market and non-market economies alike.

From the individual's perspective, the intent with entering a labour market is to obtain gainful employment which uses their skills and qualifications and rewards them appropriately, and finally from a state perspective the intent is to have the largest level of the population in paid employment as this not only supports the national economy but reduces the burden of social services or unemployment benefit payments (Lipsey and Chrystal, 2011).

Apart from the more obvious political and social implications that require policy interventions into the labour market and the individual and collective economic outcomes, the unique and critical role of labour as source of competitive advantage makes state intervention into the labour market in a positive way, both essential and necessary. The heterodox theory of value, which argues that the economic value of any product is determined by the amount of labour that is required to make it, is generally associated with Marxist economic theory (Kotz, 2009).

That line of argument is also advanced by the classical economic theories of both Adam Smith and David Ricardo (Smith et al., 2002). Although Adam Smith suggests that labour does not have monopoly over added value in advanced economies, he also recognised that even in such contexts, labour will be a significant source of added value. Ricardo (1817 in Smith et al, 2002) makes a much more direct attribution between labour as input and added economic value of the product or service that labour makes. He argues that "the value of a commodity, or the quantity of any other commodity for which it will exchange, depends on the relative quantity of labour which is necessary for its production, and not as the greater or less compensation which is paid for that labour" (Ricardo 1817 in Smith et al. 2002, p. 56). Although neo-classical theory has sought to devalue the significance of labour as determinant of economic value of products and services and, instead, privileging capital and technology, the heterodox theory of value has been applied explaining economic value of products and services in an increasingly changing, but integrated global economic system (Smith et al., 2002).

In this context, labour is the measurement of the work done by the individual and as such is defined as the human capital of an organisation or country. These terms encompass the skills possessed by workers, rather than the effort expended in their work. Thus, as Lipsey and Chrystal (2011) note, essentially the labour market works from a supply and demand perspective, where work is required to be done to meet customer demands, there is high employability but the market can shift for a variety of reasons including state intervention in relation to working hours, population intent to participate in the market, migration factors, qualifications and skillset of the available workforce and organisational and state commitment to education and training and wage rates.

Whilst these elements and characteristics may seem obvious, there is no consensus as to what constitutes characteristics of the labour market and what influencing factors shape and define the labour market. Accordingly, the next section presents and discusses the main theories of the labour market and links with the KSA.

### 3.2 THEORIES OF THE LABOUR MARKET AND LINKS WITH THE STATE

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The labour market, whilst functioning under its own dynamics and policies, is not immune to state influence. This is because policies around education provision, recruitment, selection, equal opportunities and wages rates are subject to legal intervention. For example, free or subsidized state education can lead to an increase in highly skilled university graduates, currently the case in Saudi Arabia, whereas in countries where university education is privately funded, the available pool of employees with the right skills will be reduced and potentially lead to a need to look more globally for the right employees to meet demand. In a theoretical context, there are three main perspectives, according to O'Donnell (1984), i.e.

- a) Classical and neo-classicists,
- b) the dual labour market and
- c) labour segmentation

#### **3.2.1 Classical and Neo-Classical Theory of the Labour Market**

Classical economic theory is generally associated with the works of 18<sup>th</sup> century economists the most prominent of which was Adam Smith. Essentially, the theory centres on the argument about the self-adjusting ability of the economy and, therefore, three market principles. In his most important work about the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations (1776), Adam Smith stresses two underlying principles about the power of the free market as the basis for nations to be economically competitive.



These are the principles and concepts of the ‘invisible hand’, which refers to markets ability to regulate themselves and, relating to that, therefore, the principle of *laissez-faire*, which concerns the argument for minimal state intervention and involvement in economic activity (O’Brien, 2004).

For most of the 20th century, Keynesian economic philosophy, which argues that markets lack an inherent self-regulatory mechanism and that once they fall, it would require public intervention to generate full employment (Keynes, 1936), dominated economic policy. Since markets lack the capacity for self-regulation, Keynesian economic theory proposes a greater role for the state in economic governance. However, the 1980s witnessed the emergence of economic philosophies which draw on classical arguments regarding the minimal role of the state and the dominance of the free market in economic activity. The new classical economic thinking, which informed the neo-liberal economic policies that have dominated the regulation of economic activity since the 1980s, was championed by Milton Friedman (1962) of the Chicago school and Joseph Stiglitz (whose initial enthusiasm for the free market was later tempered with disillusion) (Chu, 2015), whose anti-interventionist arguments had dominated current neo-liberal thinking about economic and social management, drawing on the classical and neo-classical arguments about the free-market and the principle of supply and demand as the basis for creating balance (equilibrium) in the economy (Ahiakpo, 2003).

According to Kirton and Green (2010), the focus of this theory is that the labour market is like any other market, with buyers and sellers (i.e. employers and employees). The variation in wages and other employment conditions comes through human capital variation in skills, education, and experience. Specifically if markets operated freely, an economy will prosper and that any imperfections in the process are the responsibility of the government to resolve, in effect it is the government’s role to adopt supply side policies and a balanced budget, backed up by the free market theory.

In addition to free-market principle, neoclassical theory also rests on the arguments about the flexibility of free market economies, the so-called Say's Law and Quantity theory. At the very basic, Say's Law argues that left on their own, economies are always able to achieve natural level of their Gross domestic product (GDP), because a free market economy will be capable of generating the demand for all that it produces and, therefore, create balance between what it supplies and the demands for it (Frank and Bernanki, 2007). This free market theory rests on the view that an economy left alone, would achieve full employment equilibrium, based on the fact that if unemployment (i.e. a surplus of labour) occurred, there would be a fall in wages, leading to a demand for labour and thus a restoration of equilibrium.

This free market argument is reinforced by Say's Law, which argues that a freely regulated economy will generate its natural level GDP by generating the demand necessary to consume what it produces. In that respect, increase in output will generate similar increase in demand and, by extension, demand for labour (employment). The difficulty with this approach is that all societies have some level of unemployment, which cannot be explained by these theories as they do not take account of social or cultural issues and the potential for a lack of desire from individuals to enter the labour market (Kaufman, 2004)

In relation to pay and pay determination, perhaps the most significant neo-classical economic concepts relate to the theories of marginal productivity, which argues that pay tends to be dictated by the marginal product of labour. By this, Hicks argues that

“At any given wage it will pay employers best to take on that number of labourers which makes their marginal product that is to say, the difference between the total physical product which is actually secured and that which would have been secured from the same quantity of other resources if the number of labourers had been increased or diminished by one<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>equal in value to the wage’ (Hicks 1932a p. 8 in Flatau, 2001, p. 2).

However, as Flatau concludes (citing Shove, 1993), Hicks' marginal productivity theory is not so much a unique contribution, but rather, a validation of Marshall's (1890) argument that in under perfect market conditions, employers would employ labour up to the point that the additional cost of extra labour is equal to additional output made from hiring that extra labour.

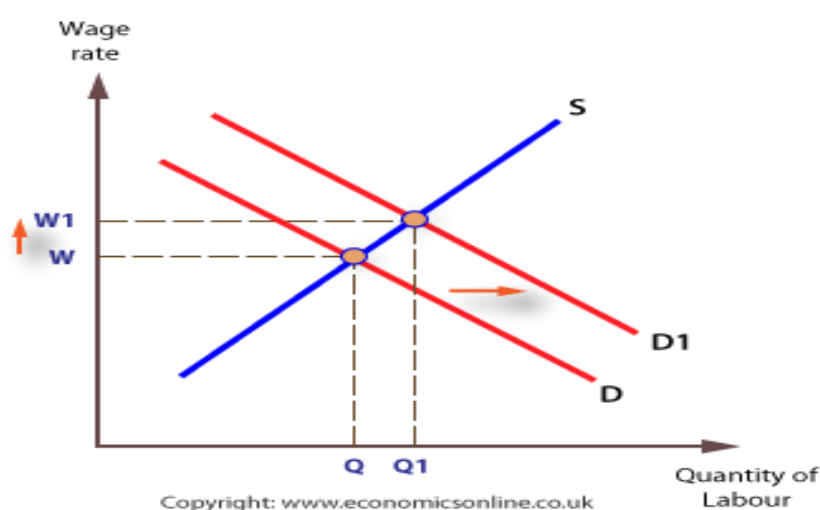
Another major theoretical contribution of neoclassical economic theory to pay determination is the "elasticity of substitution tool" (Hicks, 1932 in Flatau, 2001). According to Flatau, "the main contribution that Hicks makes to the demand side of neoclassical distribution theory is quite clearly not in the area of imperfect competition doctrine but in terms of the role to be played in neoclassical distribution theory by the substitutability of factors of production" (p. 3). In this regard, neoclassical theory views labour as the problematic factor of production and capital as much more adaptable and, therefore, a more flexible input. Consequently, capital, in its various forms, including technology can be an alternative to labour.

As Blanchard (2008) pointed out, contemporary neoclassical theory about distribution and value added in relation to factors of production, takes a more 'synthetic' approach to the problem. In that respect, it does not suggest that a self-regulating free market will create full employment. Instead, it argues that, "by proper use of monetary and fiscal policy, the old classical truths would come back into relevance". The problematic nature of this argument will be revisited later, when it is critiqued in the context of contemporary conception of flexibility as a core HRM goal (Guest, 1987). Before that, however, the limitations of the neoclassical theory are discussed in following section.

## Limitations of the Neo-Classical Theory

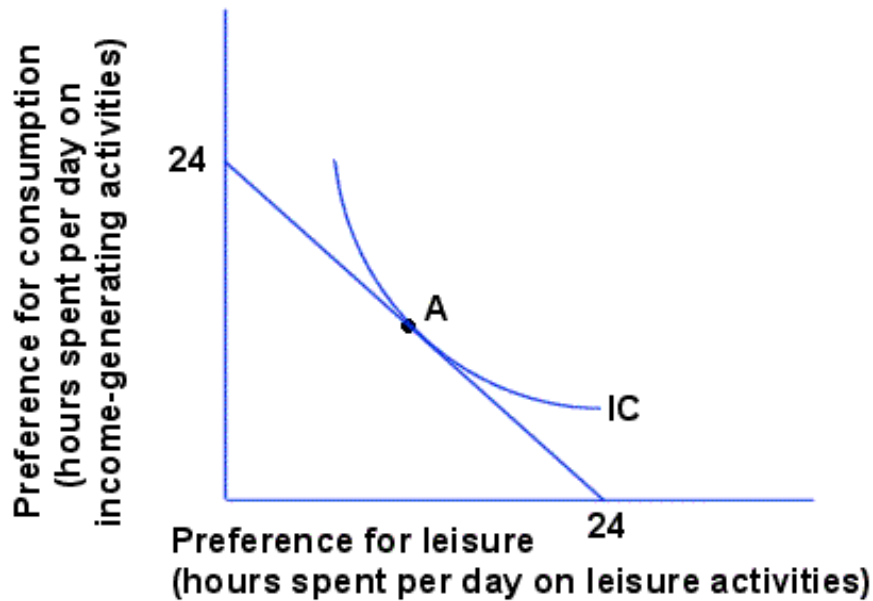
Beyond abstract neoclassical characterisation of supply and demand, the labour market can shift for a variety of reasons including state intervention in relation to working hours, population intent to participate in the market, migration factors, qualifications and skillset of the available workforce and organisational and state commitment to education and training, and wage rates (Lipsey and Chrystal, 2011), which can be illustrated in the supply and demand rates shown in Figure 3.1.

FIGURE 3.1: SUPPLY AND DEMAND RATES: WAGES VS LABOUR



However, the quantities of labour and wage rates are not the only factors which influence the workings of the labour market. In the neo-classical model, which will be considered in more detail later in this chapter, there is a trade-off between the needs of the individual in the market who wishes to earn money to purchase essential and luxury items and their desire for leisure as shown in Figure 3.2.

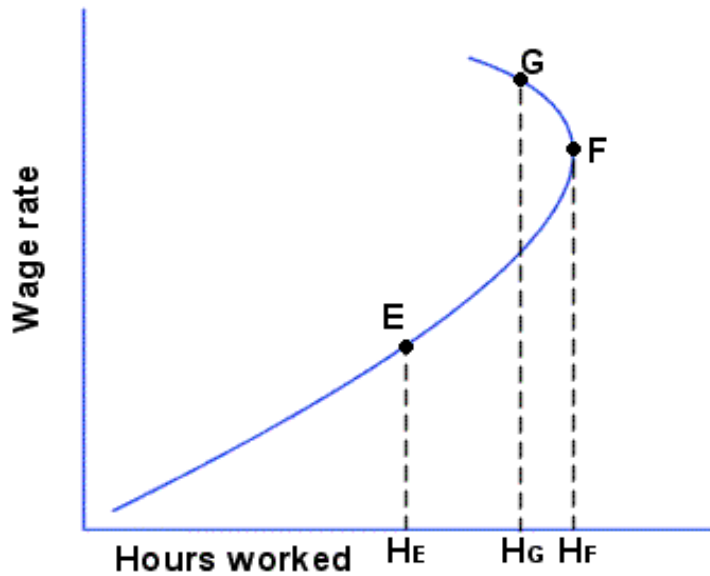
FIGURE 3.2: NEED FOR LEISURE VS NEED FOR GOODS



The decision of how many hours will be given as labour is impacted by the “indifference curve” (IC in the above graph) which can be affected by wage rates, feelings of value within their job role and even potentially social conventions (Sapsford, 2013). Understanding this approach to the labour market thus has potential resonance for female graduates in KSA who will wish to use their skills but also balance these against their desires for home and family life.

There are however other variables that can affect the balance between labour available and wages paid. For example, if the rate of pay increases there is a potential that the worker may feel there is benefit in reducing leisure hours to increase reward with more hours, seeing this as a better opportunity cost. The net effect is dependent on the individual’s circumstances where the substitution effect exceeds the income effect (meaning more hours are given to work), or the income effect exceeds the substitution effect, reducing the time at work, effectively a situation where the individual is able to make the time to spend what they have earned. These positions are shown in Figure 3.3.

FIGURE 3.3: LABOUR SUPPLY CURVE



### *The Labour Supply curve*

In effect, where the substitution effect exceeds income effect, the supply curve slopes to the right (E), but will curve in the opposite direction when hours are reduced (G and F), a position defined as negative elasticity. Each individual and to some degree labour market will have a variable supply curve as their personal circumstances and life goals change (Hilbert, 2008). There is however, also an effect from welfare, taxation, environment and societal attitudes.

What these factors mean in relation to the management of a labour market and participation is that companies and states need to understand the dynamics which create the overall situation. Specifically for female graduates, these dynamics include the societal factors which create the overall market in KSA, and the way that the market has developed in terms of its participants and state involvement in encouraging participation to achieve the supply and demand equilibrium, but also recognising technological and other changes that may affect either demand or supply.

In the context of advanced market economies there has been a significant body of research (for example: Bach, 2005; Ruiz and Walling 2005; Wolff and Resnick, 2012) to investigate how these changes occur, what effect they have and how they can be managed. However, although changes in labour market patterns in developing economies has not been subjected to the same level of enquiry as those of developed countries, there is a suggestion that similar factors will influence developing and adapting nations such as KSA (Kumar and Siddarthan, 2013) and therefore it is prudent to examine these in more detail.

These changes can be attributed, at the broad contextual levels, to globalisation and technological developments, which have brought about significant structural changes in the economies of most, if not all, advanced market economies with the resultant off-shoring of entire labour markets. Certainly this has been the case in KSA, which due to skill shortages in the national population after the discovery of oil reserves became highly dependent on foreign labour. The changes, however, can also be attributed to social phenomena such as demographic changes in labour market participation. The demographic effects are manifested in increased longevity, but also particularly through increased female labour market participation. The increase in female labour market participation in the UK and its impact on the labour market, particularly in relation to unionism is well documented (Waddington, 2003, Brown *et al.*, 2003, and Bain, 1993), and these can have resonance for this work due to the increases achieved in female participation in that country over the last fifty years.

In the Saudi context, as the State has recognised the benefits of educating women and allowing them to some degree to enter the work place, this is beginning to change the face of the labour market in the country in much the same way that this process did for Britain in the last 150 years, although it is recognised that the forces behind female participation in Saudi are government rather than union or activist movement focused.

In these terms, understanding HRM in any context also requires understanding of the nature and characteristics of the labour market, and therefore before evaluating any HRM practices, which will be the subject of the following chapter, it must be recognised that the influence of labour market institutions on employment practices is at the heart of most HRM analysis (Dunlop, 1958; Taylor, 2008). Understanding the market means recognising that it is where labour is exchanged for financial reward and the circumstances under which these transactions occur (Hendry, 2012) and that this understanding is essential to all robust analysis of HRM because product market objectives “can only be accomplished through successful competition in the labour markets in which organisations are obliged to compete with one and other in order to acquire the services of employees” (Taylor, 2008, p. 55-56).

The first area to consider, which is particularly important in relation to Saudi Arabia, is how the state can influence the operation and management of these markets. This is specifically important in the Saudi context given the government’s commitment to education of females and also its stated aim to increase the number of nationals in private and public firms rather than the traditional high expatriate workforce seen in the country (Ramady, 2013). This process, which has been elaborated under section 2.3, is defined as Saudisation (also occurring in a number of gulf states under different names), trying to tackle the dual problems of an over-reliance on foreign workers and increasing levels of national unemployment (Albayrakoglu, 2010) and thus will have a major impact on the labour markets in these regions, in particular in regard to the increased participation of Saudi women in the labour market.



### **3.2.2 The Dual Labour Market**

The dual labour market approach suggests that there are in fact two markets within any economy, one which is a legal market with positive working conditions, standard turnover and government recognition but that this is mirrored by a parallel market which has high turnover and is frequently operated on a cash only payment basis to short term employees (Saint-Paul, 1996). In addition, as Broadbent (2012) notes there is little movement between the two markets as those in the illegal market do not wish to become subject to restrictions on their payments or are unable to move into the legal market due to lack of saleable skills or qualifications. From the context of this study, as Broadbent further notes, there is frequently a high number of women working in the illegal sector as they are unable to find work within the legal, mainstream labour market.

In Saudi Arabia, as Russell (2006) and Vlieger (2012) note, there is a strong illegal (or black) market economy, trading in Visas, foreign workers and other areas where individuals both foreign and national may find work, and this can have a further impact on the number officially registered as unemployed or looking for work, according to dual market theory (Rubery, 2010).

This final theory has a basis in the recognition of the need for trade associations, unions or employer strategies which results in a segmentation of the labour market into primary and secondary sectors, making it similar to that of the dual market approach (Wilkinson, 2013; Marsden, 1986). This is because the view is that the primary sector is founded on a motivation for productivity based on salary, job security and other benefits which result in higher level employment positions with desirable employers. The secondary sector however has much higher turnover, lower motivation and is grounded in lower skill sets, and higher mobility caused by a lack of job satisfaction.

In addition, as Jenkins (2004) indicates, this theory is frequently used to explain gender and race variations within a labour market as there is a greater level of control from the employers over who they will consider for employment and thus higher levels of bias. In the case of Saudi Arabia therefore, this suggests that the primary sector has been mainly populated by foreign workers and had low levels of female participation, and that the factors which influence employment in the second sector such as employer bias and high turnover are likely to have been more magnified and impact further on female participation in the labour market (Ramady, 2010).

Despite their variable interpretations of how the labour market exists and manifests, all three theories highlight a clear relationship between economics, the individual and the organization in the shaping of the labour market, re-affirming the definition of the term in ways that underscored the simplicity of the free market individualism at the centre of neoclassical theories about labour and the labour market. Instead, it indicates a varied context involving not merely economic, but also myriad of social relations that are also shaped by historical gender, race and social status. This complexity is both a source and consequence of the economic and social inequality and skewed nature of power that manifests itself in capitalist social and economic relations. It is also the basis for alternative theories of employment and the labour market that define the context not simply in terms of individual rationality, but also in collective and institutional terms, with a key role for the state to intervene on behalf of the least powerful of the participants.

In that regard, in relation to the Saudi labour market, as Al-Dosary (2004) and Ramady (2010) highlight, the Saudisation process has been working to change the overall supply and demand factors that create the labour market in the Kingdom. In particular, the increase of education, including scholarships and funding for study abroad for both males and females has increased the overall skill set of the population, which according to

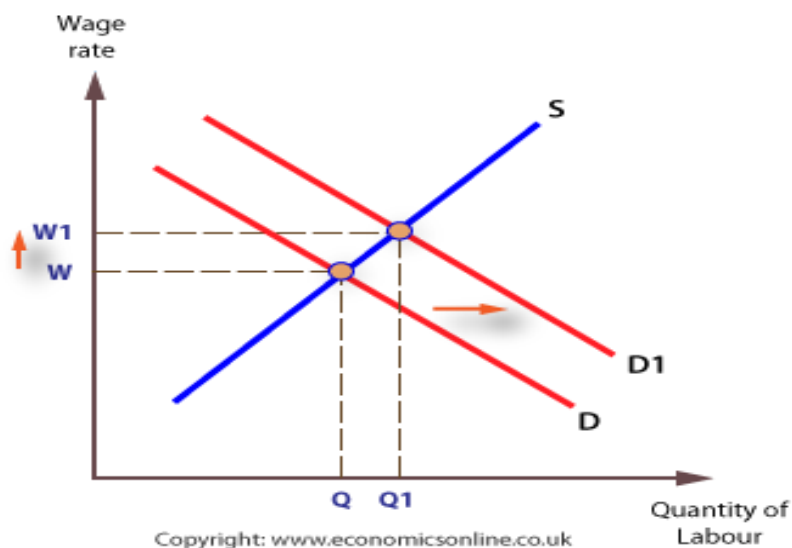
neoclassical theory would create growth in the labour supply and thus has led to the current imbalance in terms of supply and demand illustrated by the high unemployment levels, particularly amongst females (Weidman, 2010). It is however recognized that framing the situation in these theories alone is not sufficient as other factors such as culture, religion, and social beliefs also play a part, and these areas will be discussed in the context of the Saudi labour market later in this chapter.

As a result of this perspective, significant parts of the literature have been focused on the link between the labour market and HRM practices in organisations. These linkages can be made from both a macroeconomic and micro levels of analysis. At the macro level, the linkage can be made in terms of how neoliberal ideology and policy intervention helped open the enabling environment for the introduction of HRM in Britain (Storey, 2001, 2006) and the idea of HR as source of competitive advantage (ibid). At the micro-level, some economic theories of pay determination, such job evaluation (Armstrong and Murlis, 2005) and performance related pay (Kessler, 2005), are associated management practices that are associated with HRM.

In effect therefore, the labour market is defined as what determines wages and jobs availability, based on the supply and demand for the labour (Claydon and Thompson, 2010). The view of the labour market as determining levels of pay on the basis of supply and demand for the product that labour makes is based on the neoclassical theory and its perfect competitive market assumption (Brown and Nolan, 1988; Wolff and Resnick, 2012; Nolan and Slater, 2009). This is the derived demand theory of the labour market (see figure 3.4). It is based on the simple, if weak argument that, demand and, therefore, price for labour, like all factors of production, depends on the demand for and, therefore, price of the product that they make (Lipsey and Chrystal, 1999, 2007). It follows, therefore that, although the relative abundance of labour, supply, will influence how much that labour will cost, the demand for it is also regulated by the demands for product.

Therefore, in general macroeconomic terms, it is expected that the demand for labour will increase at times of economic expansion and growth. Conversely, in periods of economic slowdown, or recession, the overall demand for labour falls as employers cut back on production in the face of decline in demand for goods and services.

FIGURE 3.4: DERIVED DEMAND FOR LABOUR



Hendry (2012) however, notes that the labour market should be understood not only in terms of the economic exchange that employment entails, but it should also be defined in terms of the circumstances under which such exchanges take place, recognising the value of the segmentation approach and the influence of unions, trade associations and other institutions which affect how a society views working and the labour market overall. In line with Braverman (1974) therefore, Abbott (2013) argues that the labour market is different from the typical product markets, because labour is significantly different to any other commodity. The differences between labour and other factors of production lie in the animate nature of labour and, therefore, the indeterminacy of labour and the employment relationship (Braverman, 1974; Edwards, 2003).

It follows, therefore, that when an employer hires an employee, they are simply offering price based on the assessment of the ability of the potential employee to do the work for which they are hired. Ensuring that they actually deliver the labour for which they are hired requires much more than the perceived control that could be exerted by employer by virtue of the wages they pay. Critically, and to a significant extent, it also requires the consent of the employee to be managed and controlled (Gintis, 1987). However, the more fundamental problem with the neoclassical theory of the labour market is that the core argument relating to equilibrium does not explain why there are pay differentials between labour market participants (Brown and Nolan, 1988).

Also, apart from the fact that labour is not like other products and services and therefore the quantity of labour does not increase or decrease in response to the actual market demand (Burchill, 1976; Kerr 1977), it is difficult or impossible to have equilibrium in labour market, because there is always some unemployment, (Hall and Lieberman, 2012), which forces some in the labour market who are in need, to look for and work for very low pay and terms and conditions, highlighting the validity of the dual market theory and the high incidence of illegal markets for employment.

Crucially, the neoclassical theory is critiqued for failing to provide explanations for pay differentials that arise from different and unequal labour market power and therefore, value (Schutz, 2011). In that regard, alternative economic explanations, such as human capital theory (Lipsey and Chrystal, 1999), “non-competing groups” (Bach, 2008) and the ability of certain categories and class workers to institutionally demarcate and restrict entry into their labour market (Kerr, 1977), are advanced for explanations for pay differentials.

In addition, to alternative market theories to the neoclassical explanation, non-market factors such as gender, race and geography are also given as basis for more robust explanations for the relationship between the labour market and HR policy and practice especially in relation pay levels and pay determination (For example; Lipsey and Chrystal, 2011; Brown and Nolan, 1988; Brown et al., 2003).

In order to try and explain these differences between the labour market and other forms of supply and demand, Lipsey and Chrystal (2011), and Brown et al. (2003), cite human capital theory. Specifically, individuals may hold different labour market positions and advantages due to differences in their qualifications, skills, physical strength and ability (Brown et al., 2003, pp. 192-93), as well as those who improve their individual capital through formal education and skills acquisition, there are individuals who have a superior labour market position by virtue of naturally endowed talent or physical features. Lipsey and Chrystal (2011) define this category as “non-competing groups” whose labour market value is not dictated by the supply and demand argument that is the essence of the neoclassical theory of the labour market (Mill, 1848).

However, these assumptions are very problematic as they underscore the way that the neoclassical theory is an abstraction from reality given that few markets are perfectly competitive, and organisations, like workers, are rarely free to enter and leave markets as and when they choose (Bryson and Forth, 2008). This is particularly true in Saudi Arabia where restrictions on movement and mobility of workers, both foreign and national, requires adherence to strict regulations and policies and visa control, although as Cordesman and Obaid (2005) highlight, the Saudisation agenda has an intent to increase flexibility of movement of workers in the future.

Furthermore, as Brown and Nolan (1988) point out, long term unemployment and wage rigidities are examples that the labour market does not clearly define as claimed by proponents of this theory, for they ignore the dependency of the conditions of market exchange on the social and political relations of production and distribution. They go on to assert that dismissal of the influence of workers and their organisation and, indeed, the state, as artificial distortions which inhibit the functioning of the labour market (equilibrium), is further proof of the argument that the neoclassical theory fails to account for the fact that there is no direct link between trade union membership and the level of unemployment in an industry or in the economy (Ibid). Whilst the dual market and segmentation theories provide a wider view they do not fully provide an alternative to the neoclassical approach, as they focus on defining differences in the market rather than how these differences manifest and, crucially, what accounts for the differences. Critiques of the classical and neoclassical theories suggest an alternative explanation in the form of an institutional theory.

### **3.2.3 Institutional Theory of the Labour Market**

Institutional theorists view the labour market not in terms invisible hand and the economic rationale of individual actors, but rather, more in terms of system theory comprising of groups of actors and institutional frameworks that influence and regulate their individual and collective behaviours, decisions and actions (Abbott, 2013; Fine, 2013). This approach considers that the labour market is characterised by power relations, interdependency and customs and norms (Beardwell and Claydon, 2007).

In these terms, the institutional theory of the labour market is cited as the opposite of the neoclassical theory (Claydon, 2007; Kaufman, 2004). However, Kaufman also argues that early institutional theorist did not completely reject the neoclassical theory of supply and demand; they simply regarded it as too narrow and lacking depth.

For evidence, he cited Commons as stating that “the commodity theory of labour is not wrong, it is incomplete” (Commons, 1919, p. 17 in Kaufman, 2004, p. 111). To that end, perhaps Fine’s conclusion about the institutional theory of the labour makes it a more holistic theory of understanding the nature of the labour market. Following a detailed and critical review of literature, he concludes that the institutional theory “is interdisciplinary in drawing on various types of institutional theory, and it is sensitive to empirical and historical contingencies in so far as the (institutional) outcomes of the past affect those of the future” (Fine, 2013, p. 99).

Importantly in the context of Saudi Arabia particularly, the theory recognises that supply and demand are insufficient as the only explanation for the way a labour market behaves and changes. The assertion from this theory is that consideration must also be given to the different dynamics of particular labour markets, industry pay rates the complex roles played by the trade unions, the state and other organisations in the regulating and managing the labour market. What this means is that particular industries and sectors may operate on a more internal basis less impacted by competitive external market forces and thus affect the overall labour market. At the same time, there is influence from social and cultural factors making this a more holistic approach than that of the neo-classicists and thus potentially more relevant in the context of a developing labour market such as that in Saudi Arabia.

The increased presence of multinational corporations and numbers of Saudi HR managers trained in Western countries (like the UK and USA) manifest themselves in the increasing diffusion of Anglo-American HRM practices in Saudi Arabia (Budhwar and Melliki, 2005). The fact that such practices are informed by unitarist neoclassical views of the organisation and employment practices (Redman and Wilkinson, 2006, 2009) would also suggest the neoclassical influence in the Saudi labour market.



However, the influence of the Saudi government, both indirectly as a major employer and, directly through policy interventions such as Saudisation, suggests that the Institutional theory has greater application. This, however, does not suggest that the current study gives priority in consideration of one perspective over another. This is simply because regardless the pervasive influence of the state over the labour market, the evidence suggests that some, especially foreign MNCs, manage their internal labour markets in ways that are consistent with the voluntarist free-market approach in Rubery and Gramshaw (2003).

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### 3.3 LABOUR MARKET TYPES

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#### **3.3.1 External Labour Markets**

Labour market theories, whilst providing an understanding of how the labour market *operates*, do not necessarily provide recognition of the different types of labour market, which may exist to reflect different labour characteristics, dynamics and types of labour. Whilst classical theories only divide the market into internal and external and primary and secondary markets (Roberts, 1995), Beardwell and Claydon (2007) note that these can be further divided into open external labour markets, structured occupational labour markets and internal labour markets.

An *open external* labour market refers to the labour market where all workers are deemed to be looking for jobs at all times with firms recruiting based on the labour needs or business needs. These labour market types are generally associated with unskilled and, or semi-skilled labour and casual forms of employment encouraged by extreme fluctuations in business (Hendry, 1995). Wages in open unstructured labour markets are generally determined by the forces of demand and supply, and can be subject to high levels of turnover due to the fluctuating forces of demand and supply.

A structured occupational labour market in comparison, whilst also external, are those which are regulated on the basis of ability, skills and qualifications, and thus constitutes professions such as medicine, engineering and other sectors where a defined skill set is necessary for effective achievement of organisational and personal requirements.

What is important in both these types of external labour market is that the opportunities are open and available to anyone in the labour market, provided they meet the job based criteria. From an organisational perspective, operating within the external labour market does mean that when recruiting for specific positions there may be a wider pool of suitable labour from which to make their selections. However, as firms grow and recognise the value of investing in their human capital, there is an increasing view that dependence on the internal labour market may be growing (Hines, 2013), and specifically in the context of large multi-national firms who are able to invest the necessary resources in training and development.

### **3.3.2 Internal Labour Markets**

According to Doeringer and Piore (1971), internal labour is “an administrative unit where the price of labour is determined by sets of administrative rules and procedures and not only by the economic forces of the external labour market” (p. 19). The internal labour market operates on the basis of career progression characterised by internal promotion from within the organisation and limited and restricted entry into the organisation by new employees, with the external market only being considered when internal sources have been exhausted.

This highlights that although the internal labour market is focused on employees of a specific, usually large, organisation or institution, there is a connection to external markets as “movements between them occur at certain job classifications which constitute ports of entry and exit to and from the ILM” (Doeringer and Piore, 1971, p.2).

ILMs are therefore, generally based on the implied as opposed to explicit contract theory with informal agreements for continuity of employment and commitment on the part of the employee and continuity of employment security with chances for career progression by the employer. In that regard, the psychological contract in terms of perceive expectations of the parties (Cullinane and Dundon, 2006; Guest and Conway, 2002) is perceived to be a more significant determinant of labour market behaviour.

In effect, the internal labour market is essentially the term for the market which exists within a particular organisation, referring specifically to its internal supply of labour. Broadly this means the way that existing employees are given roles within a large organisation. The particular characteristics of an internal labour market are shaped by the policies and practices of the firm, including investment in training and development, job security and turnover. This can be impacted on by the types of skills and qualifications required by the organisation for its product or services, but also by the organisation's HRM approaches. In that regard, the kind of employees in terms of technical skills and levels of cognitive input that is required to carry out tasks, tend to determine how the internal labour market is managed (Nolan and Slater, 2003). Within the NHS, for example, the management of the internal labour market for consultants, doctors and professional nurses is most probably different to how the NHS manages the labour market for cleaners and other low end skilled workers. From a classical perspective the idea of an internal labour market refers primarily to a highly structured approach, limiting access to those outside the organisation, although this is usually the case only with larger firms who have a ready supply of labour that can be developed into more senior positions. In smaller firms the internal market may not operate in this way due to limited development opportunities and thus a resultant higher turnover or lack of skills (Grimshaw *et al.*, 2008).

Although some have associated the increasing reliance of employers on their internal labour market as a response to complexities in labour market Williamson *et al.* (1975), Abbott (2010), Milgrom and Roberts (1992), Doeringer and Piore(1971), and Nolan and Slater (2009) identify three additional reasons why organisations depend on their ILMs. Firstly, they suggest that organisations seek to develop human capital, which facilitates and increases productivity, but only if and when applied to work in an organisational context. Two related assumptions underpin this argument. First, is the general assumption that higher the human capital, the higher the level of productivity both quantitatively and qualitatively. Related to that argument is the idea of relations between task complexity and task discretion, meaning highly trained and skilled employees can carry out complex tasks with less requirement for managerial oversight (Lipsey and Chrystal, 2007).

The second related assumption with this rationale is that the product (productivity) commits the employee to the employer organisation thus making them less likely to leave. Abbott (2010), Nolan and Slater (2009) and Benson *et al.*, (2011) however, see the focus on the internal labour market as part of some employers' repertoire of motivation strategies and mechanisms aimed at securing commitment from employees as well as retention of knowledge, which in large multi-national firms is crucial for competitive advantage. The practice is identified as being common in Asian firms, such as Toyota, or even non-Asian firms that are operating in East Asia, like HSBC (Rowley *et al.*, 2011), where the aim is to retain knowledge within the organisation.

An additional reason for an increasing focus by large firms on the internal labour market is the wage efficiency approach. This concerns efficiencies that can be made by recruiting from within the organisation's labour market. Nolan and Slater (2003) have argued that major business organisations that required high-skilled workers tend to focus more on their internal labour market to avoid costly competition for talent in external professional labour

markets. In this context there is an argument that when firms pay at higher than market rates or provide training and development with the promise of improved wages in the future there is a greater level of motivation to be loyal and productive (Osterman, 2010). The final argument for focusing on an internal labour market is that productivity is believed to be positively correlated to the alignment of long term personal and organisational goals that are achieved through a long term employment relationship incorporating career progression (Bacon *et al.*, 2013).

This focus on career development and internal markets is important in relation to this study because, because, Rubery and Grimshaw (2003) argue, firms that focus on their internal labour market as source for human resource also tend to focus on their individual organisational needs as determined by the employer. Unlike firms that focus on the occupational (external) labour market, whose “focus of employee status” tends to be on “possession of recognised occupational qualifications”, the “focus of status in firms that rely on their international labour market tend to be on positions within the firm” (ibid, p. 110). Furthermore being that “employee mobility” in firms that rely on their internal labour markets is “restricted to job ladders within the firm” (ibid), in the case developing organisational where multi-nationals and large state organisations are focused on developing internal employees only; this clearly restricts entry of females to these organisations *via* the external market, identifying at least one contributory factor to the low levels of female participation in the labour market. Within the Saudi labour market therefore, in large organisations at least there needs to be encouragement to focus on the external market if unemployment amongst females is to be reduced in the future. This perspective ties into earlier comments regarding the importance and influence of state intervention as the Saudisation programme has the capacity to ensure that large organisations in the Kingdom focus on the external as well as the internal labour markets.

It should also be noted that the three reasons why firms are focusing on internal labour markets have been, in the past in developed countries at least been supported by the influence of trade unions, increased demands for job security and a country's culture and customs about life time employment (Doeringer and Piore, 1971). The difficulty with this has been that employers have been reluctant to commit to long term security but still require commitment from workers (Legge, 2005). By adopting a strategy of utilising the ILM, employers give the semblance, if not reality, of secured employment and investment to employees by shielding them from greater levels of competition.

What is more, the ILM is governed by rules and procedures that are classified into four categories by Osterman (1987). These rules relate to job categorisation and definition, internal labour mobility including redeployment of labour, hiring procedures, rules about employment security that concern matters of job tenure, redundancies and severance, and finally, rules relating to how wages are determined (pay system) and how pay is attached to job or to the individual (job evaluation and pay structure). In the context of Saudi Arabia therefore, as Budhwar and Mellawi, (2006) note, the internal labour market and the potential opportunities for women are impacted on by social and cultural factors as highlighted in the background to the country section, governmental intervention but also organisational perspectives of senior managers. All of these combine to create potential barriers to increasing female participation in the labour market, if organisations continue to focus on the internal market only.

The strategic view of Riley and Thompson (2010) is that the increasing focus on the ILM is based on a belief of the benefits provided in relation to improvement of performance and a resultant mutual benefit for both parties in the employment exchange transaction.

Osterman's analysis (1987), which represents a radical view, however, argues that ILMs only serve to improve managerial control over labour and organisations increasing reliance on their internal market reflects changes in broader economic ideology and employment since the 1980s. Considering this view in a more contemporary perspective, Galanis and Dignam (2009) note that a focus on the internal or external market is more an organisational response to market forces and economics and that a reliance on internal markets is generally due to a desire to encourage investment in human resources with the now accepted recognition of the value of workers and their knowledge and skills to an organisation.

However, Grimshaw *et al.* (2008) also further note that the classical model of the ILM is changing as the external forces that drive the need to look for movement within the ILM are evolving. In particular, the fact that organisation of work and working hours is becoming less rigid and more flexible due to the market demands being placed on firms. At the same time, the notion of working for one firm only throughout a working life is becoming less common, with many individuals looking for varied careers and thus individuals will be more focused on the external market, reducing the viability of the internal labour market.

The implications of these changing perspectives for the labour market has facilitated employers' ability to have greater control over their employment strategies and practices by allowing them to focus on their internal labour markets but also recognising that there is value in encompassing the external market. The next section discusses these changes, which are potentially some of the reasons why flexible employment practices have increased across the globe, (Kesavan et al., 2014).

Since the global deregulation of professional and financial services in the mid-1980s, there have been significant changes in the global economy that have also significantly impacted on labour markets. These changes are a consequence of both wider global economic imperatives, but also attitudes of national governments, especially in developed economies, about the role of labour in national economic competitiveness (Dicken, 2011; Brown et al., 2003; Bach, 2003; Willward et al., 2004). The changes in the labour market since the 1980s can be understood at two levels.

In the first level of analysis, globalisation facilitated by a resurgent neo-liberal macroeconomic ideology and characterised by internationalisation of hitherto national labour markets, the international transfer and adoption of new working practices (Chomsky, 2012), and new international division of labour that enables firms to take advantage of comparative distribution of factors of production (cheap labour) by off-shoring jobs and operations on a global basis (Dicken, 2007, 2011; Edwards and Rees, 2011; Rugman and Collinson, 2006; Brown *et al.*, 2003). Although Chomsky is writing about the *Occupy Movement*, Population movement and uprising against global capitalism in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis, he sets the movement in the context of the antecedent neoliberal interventions of the 1985/86 that set in motion, policies and behaviours that made the crisis inevitable.

The second broad level factor concerns the very significant structural changes in the economies of most developed countries. These include a move from traditional manufacturing to new industries, both high technology and service sector industry, which has changed the nature of employment in developed countries.



As indicated in Table 3.1, the UK economy, which is representative of many developed economies, for example, witnessed significant restructuring and shift from manufacturing dominance to a service sector dominant economy, with similar sectoral changes in employment.

TABLE 3.1: KEY CHANGES IN EMPLOYMENT BY SECTOR, OVER 25 YEARS

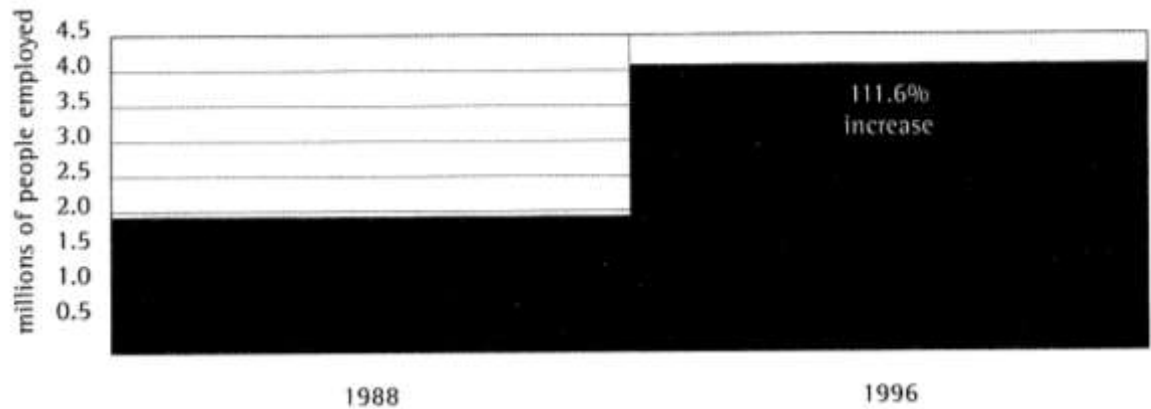
Sector	Employment (000s)		Changes (%)
	June 1978	June 2003	
Real estate, renting machinery, & computer acts.	1,783	3,964	122
Hotels and restaurants	1,082	1,818	68
Health and Social work	1,700	2,854	68
Education	1,592	2,240	41
Financial services	757	1,050	39
Wholesaling & retailing	3,631	4,451	23
Food products, beverages, tobacco	715	467	-35
Textile and Clothing	814	180	-78
Footwear and leather goods	124	15	-88
Manufacturing	6,922	3,501	-49
Mining & quarrying	383	71	-81

Source: DTI (2004 in Bach, 2005)

Development in labour markets and employment practices in developing economies have also seen some changes that can be attributed to globalisation, with the relocation of manufacturing industries in low cost economies that provide cheap and docile labour (Moody, 1997). These changes have had two different, but equally adverse outcomes for employment in both developed and developing economies (ibid).

The shift in manufacturing labour markets from developed to various developing economies, especially in Asia, has led to the introduction of various forms of precarious employment that have been subjected to extensive levels of analysis and critique (Klein, 2000, 2010; Moody, 1997), while emergence and entrenchment of atypical forms of employments including casualization, have become the norm in developed economies (Kersley et al., 2006; Ward et al., 2001).

TABLE 3.2: GROWTH OF EMPLOYMENT THROUGH TEMP AGENCIES: EUROPE & USA 1988 AND 1996



Source: International Confederation of Temporary Work Businesses (CIETT); Countries included: U.K., France, Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Denmark and the U.S.

TABLE 3.3: AVERAGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE EMPLOYED DAILY BY TEMP AGENCIES US 1970 & 1990



Source: Bruce Steinberg, "Temporary Help Annual Update for 1997," *Contemporary Times*, Spring 1998; Timothy W. Brogan, "Staffing Services Annual Update" (1999), National Association of Temporary and Staffing Services.

The data in table 3.2 and 3.3 show a significant increase in the use of temporary workers over the course of the 1970s and 1990s. Particularly in USA, but also in most OECD countries, the increase in temporary working contracts is related to the decline of manufacturing and decreased job security in general. In the 1970s, major American cities – for example, Cleveland, Ohio, Detroit – were industrial centres, whose loss of economic relevance due to disappearing manufacturing industries is captured in Phillip Meyer's *American Rust* (2010) that tells the story of the lost American dream and the desperation in

a Pennsylvania steel town, after the mills closed in the 1980s. The concept of a job-for-life was also eroded.

In developing countries there are a relatively higher percentage of women in temporary and shift work labour markets. Biological and cultural reasons offer some indication as to why this situation exists. Only women can physically bear children therefore, women with children commonly require more flexible working conditions. While the proportion of people in temporary jobs globally has, overall, increased between 1993 and 2002, there has been significant increase in the number of people in atypical forms of employment such as both temporary and part-time work. The Institute for Public Policy Research (2012) labour market trends show that since the 2008 recession, 53% and 43% respectively of men and women are in part-time and temporary employment because they are unable to secure permanent employment. Compared to men, the proportion of women in such jobs can be said to have increased only moderately, or in some cases slightly declined. Japan leads the developed nations in the proportion of temporary workers, while workers in USA are relatively more likely to have a permanent contract. This however again relates to the employer-provided nature of private health care in USA – most employees want to have a permanent contract to ensure eligibility for health benefits.

The structural changes undergone by these developed countries, arguably, have led to a much more flexible marketplace and particularly show a relatively moderate increase in the number of women in either temporary or shift-based employment roles (IPPR, 2014). This suggests that where a country has developed economically, there is a concurrent potential for increases in flexible working patterns, with increase tendency towards concerns about work-life balance. This will be discussed in more detail in a later section, along with reasons for why they are a viable option for Saudi Arabia to consider.

Given the economic and industrial changes in the country highlighted in the brief history and economic development of the country in the background section, this further underlines the potential benefits of flexible working practices as a means of increasing female access and participation to the labour market in the country, which could potentially improve the capacity of women to better manage their traditionally defined social roles and the aspirations for formal labour market participation. In conjunction with these changes in working patterns within developed countries, there have also been changes in relation to globalisation (Cooke, 2005; Budhwar and Debrah, 2005).

### **3.4.1 Globalisation and Impact on Labour Markets**

The term globalisation, according to Giddens (1990), in a simple sense indicates the increased global connections between people, economies and nations. In essence it means the linking together of many aspects of human existence through technology and the expansion of firms into new markets, either remotely or by setting operations in new locations. This has an effect on social and economic relationships and networks and a wider cultural impact as greater knowledge is shared between different regions and nations through the compressing of distances, breaking down of protectionist policies and opening up new channels for business (Mullard and Cole, 2007).

While acknowledging the simplification of most definitions of the concept of globalisation, Giddens suggests a four dimensional framework. These dimensions are the capitalist economy; the nation state; military order; and industrial development in the form of the international division of labour (Giddens, 1990, pp. 70-75). Of the four dimensions, perhaps, the capitalist economies, which are dominant centres of global economic activity and home to the biggest Multinational Enterprises (MNEs), are the most dominant. Accordingly, Giddens notes that “if nation-states are the principle ‘actors’ within the global political order, corporations are the dominant agents within the world economy” (p. 71).

In real terms this means that firms from developed countries have been expanding into new markets and developing more liberalised approaches to trade between regions and countries. The term “liberalised approaches” refers to a freer and open trading and operating process across the world, opening borders and working towards a more integrated world of commerce (Mikitani 2013). These structural changes have been a combination of state, marketplace and employer adaptation to and recognition of, the potential that exists in globalising operations (Tapings and Melany, 2000 in Mikitani, 2013). In less developed countries however, the effects have been less positive as they have been unable to make the structural changes as quickly and efficiently as the developed countries which has led to some concerns about the imbalanced effect of globalisation on these regions, including Saudi Arabia. For example, as McMillan and Roderick (2011) indicate, one of the issues is a gap in productivity between traditional labour market productivity and the modern labour market.

This facet was highlighted in the background section when reviewing the rapid change the country underwent from an agricultural to oil producing economy and the resultant skill set deficit that this led to, with the net outcome of a reliance on foreign labour, low skill and education levels within the national population and the current low employment levels. In the context of this study moreover, the rapid pace of globalisation has meant that the value that could be achieved from the increase in education for women has not been achieved due to the residual barriers to participation in the labour market, some of which have already been identified.

From the HRM perspective, which will be covered later as part of the literature review, the role in these changing markets should be to implement and manage policies and practices that recognise the changes that have occurred in terms of flexibility and movement within internal and external labour markets both nationally and internationally (Michie and Sheehan, 2003).

In the particular case of Saudi Arabia this also means managing the change from a high expatriate workforce to a more localised labour supply, which incorporates the role of university educated women in the labour market, as Rees *et al.* (2007) indicate.

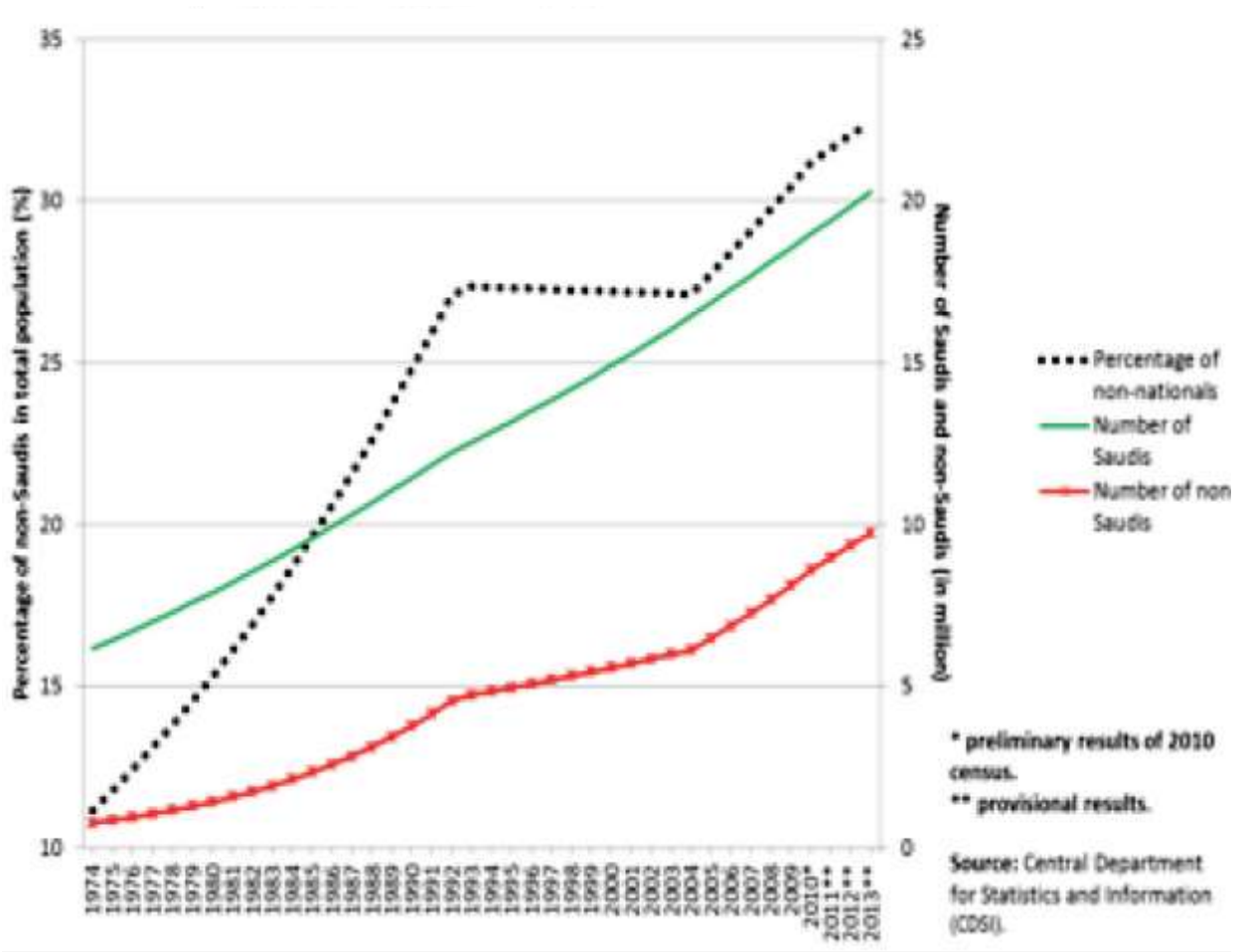
### **3.4.2 Effects of Globalisation**

Globalization can be indicated to have adversely impacted the employment situation in Saudi Arabia for national and thus women's participation in the labour market. The term globalization refers to the integration of national economies on a worldwide scale due to a reduction in the restrictions placed on the flow of goods, investments, currencies and services between countries (Kohli, 2008). In that respect, the key economic actors are Multinational Enterprises (MNE) that have increasingly undermined nation states' ability to regulate economic activity (Dicken, 2011; Edwards and Rees, 2011; Petras and Veltmeyer, 2001; Hirst and Thompson, 1996). MNEs have used their control over foreign direct investment (FDI) in a dominant neoliberal global economic context to exacerbate competition between governments and even trade unions and in doing so drive down terms and conditions of employment (Hirst and Thompson, 1999). In the leading neoliberal context, where both nation state, international regulatory regimes and national level employee organisation are limited, MNEs have remained the main economic actors that, according to Moody (2007) and Klein (2007), have no loyalty to any particular community and, in their drive for accumulation of profit, show no concern for even the most minimum of terms and conditions of employment. The increased economic potential and access to new sources of labour, is the reason why many countries pursue globalization in anticipation of increased national prosperity. However, not all countries have had a positive experience of globalisation, particularly in terms of its indigenous labour force. The discovery of oil reserves and the value this offers to foreign organisations has meant that the Saudi labour market has been heavily impacted by off shoring and immigration practices.

Off shoring is the practice of basing some or all of a company's operations overseas in order to benefit from lower costs and potentially cheaper labour, although can also mean moving individuals from one operating region to another. A report for ACAS, by Ursula Huws and Sarah Podro (ACAS, 2012) describe the practice as amounting to "fragmentation of the employment relationship" (p. 1). The practice has become one of most the most significant arsenals in the process of lean production that most global integrated production systems aim for as a means of gaining and sustaining competitive advantage (Delbridge, 2011). However, although it enables firms to gain competitive advantage through efficiencies gained from production in low cost economies, it also an insidious aspect to it in terms of fragmenting the employment relationship by ensuring that no particular group of employees has control over the entire production process (ibid). In the specific case of Saudi Arabia, the practice also refers to the mining of resources such as oil from offshore sites (Winkler, 2009; OECD, 2010), using either local or immigrant/expatriate labour sources.

Saudi Arabia's position in the Gulf and thus its ownership of the oil reserves has meant that many international energy companies have sited operations in the country and created links with Saudi organisations to be able to benefit from the available resources. This has meant an influx of foreign workers to the country, not just those brought in by global companies but also economic migrants from countries such as India and Indonesia hoping to benefit from the flow of wealth into the country generated by oil (ILO, 2009). The net effect of this on the labour market in Saudi Arabia has been that many jobs are taken by migrants or foreign employees of off-shored companies, negatively affecting the availability of work for Saudi nationals and placing a high reliance on foreign workers as already indicated. Despite the government's commitment to Saudisation, there has been a steady climb in immigration and non-Saudi workers since 1974.

FIGURE 3.5: TOTAL SAUDI AND NON-SAUDI RESIDENTS 1974-2013



Source: De Bel-Air (2014)

What this means for domestic firms is that as levels of off shoring and immigration increase, domestic firms gain access to more foreign workers who may be employed in both the home and foreign country. Moreover, off shoring and immigration “predominantly entail relocating low-skilled tasks abroad and an influx of low-skilled workers” (Hickman & Olney, 2011, pp.655). The interplay of these forces results in a “Labour supply shock” that tends to displace low-skilled native workers (Hickman & Olney, 2011, pp.655). The influx of low skilled migrant workers in response to the off shoring low skilled tasks increases the supply of labour over and above marginal value of product, with the potential consequences of driving down wages and/or causing increased levels of unemployment.

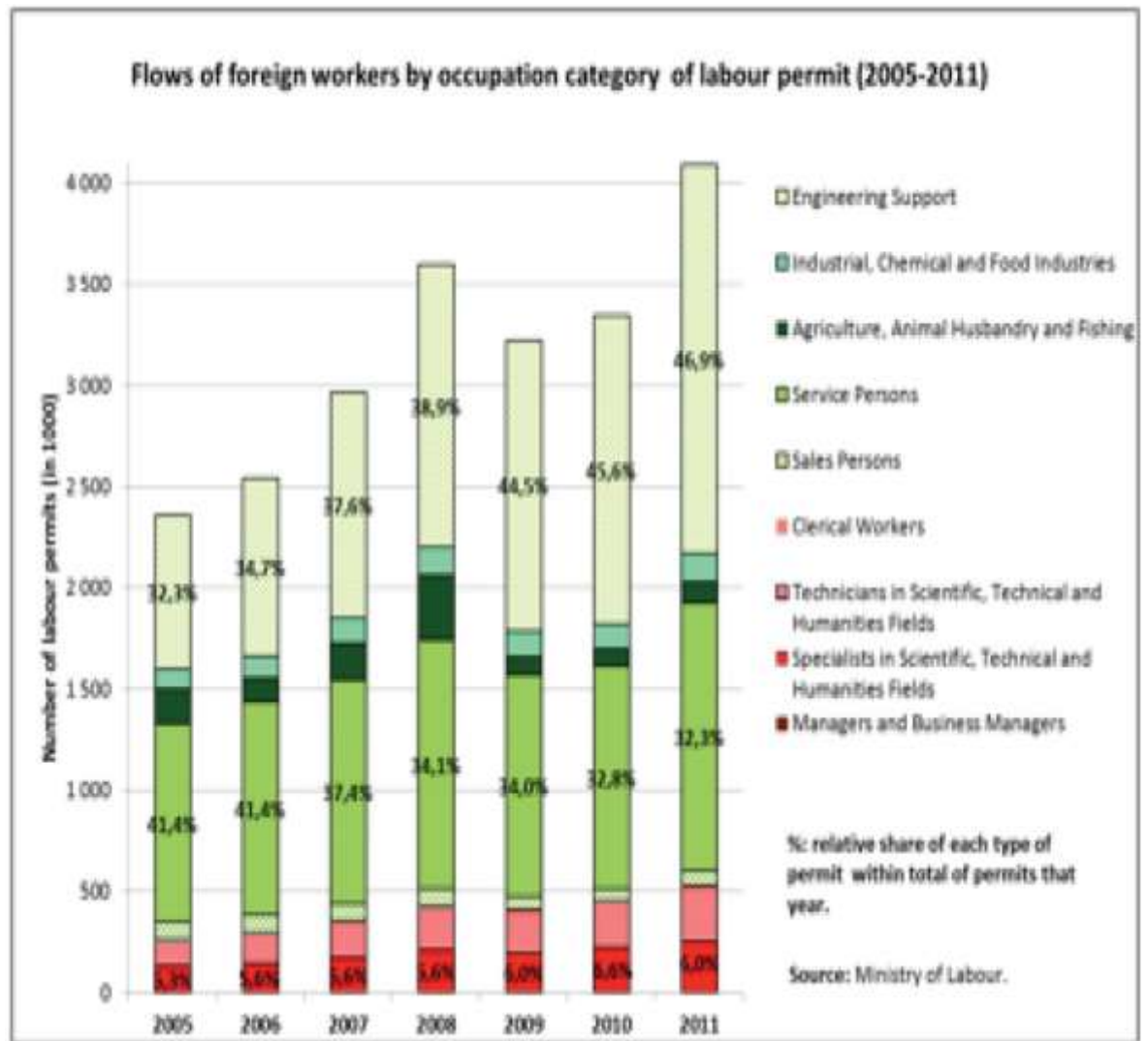


A labour supply as such will naturally affect the aggregate demand curve in the short run, rendering the labour market a buyer market and driving down wages as there is excess labour in the market.

Of particular interest for this work is the low level of foreign workers in specialist, high qualification fields in the country, which suggests that there are opportunities for qualified female graduates in this field without displacement of high numbers of foreign nationals, who appear to be sectorised in petroleum exploration, engineering and industrial areas (see Figure 3.6). At the same time however, it is reasonable to believe that native low-skilled workers will respond to the resulting increased competition for employment by striving to acquire better skills. This way, with appropriate training and further education, they may directly compete with foreigners because they are able to move up the skill distribution within the relevant Labour market.

Recognising this, the government has invested heavily in education and skills training for females, reducing the number of women in the country who are illiterate and increasing those with degree or higher education qualifications (CDSI, 2013). Where the demand is high for skilled and medium skilled workers, which is the case in KSA, if the appropriate strategies are not introduced, the labour market needs to be globally extended: a situation clearly seen in Saudi Arabia where there is a high reliance on foreign skills. Therefore, the need to encourage the development of relatively high skilled national population to enable them to fill these national skill shortages is clear. However it is also evident that there may be a place in filling these skills gaps for the increased numbers of female graduates who have benefited from changes and advances to education provision over the last decades. In this respect, the education strategies of the government are contained in their overall employment strategy, which is discussed later in this chapter.

FIGURE 3.6: IMMIGRANT WORKERS BY SECTOR



Source: De Bel-Air (2014)

In Saudi Arabia, the shortage of skilled workers who are also nationals has been further complicated by inadequate educational systems and relatively low population (Achoui, 2009). Other complicating elements include religion, tradition and values that adversely impact shortage of skilled workers. For example, in Saudi Arabia, only a few women are part of the Labour force due to traditional beliefs that their priorities ought to be their religious roles and their roles as homemakers. In addition to these, many young people in Saudi Arabia shun work in manual and low status jobs due to the social stigma attached to these types of work.

As a result, most young people have a preference for working in managerial or administrative positions (Achoui, 2009), or for state institutions, a situation which has not changed in the last few years (Naffee, 2014). According to OECD (2011) this is because the Saudi nationals do not view private sector wages and working conditions as desirable or high in social standing and thus in some cases would prefer to not work rather than take a position in the private sector.

However, the wage burden on the government is not sustainable as McDowall (2014) notes and thus the state has been evaluating how to increase participation of nationals within the private sector. For women particularly this is a difficult situation, as Allam (2013) notes, with those with connections taking the few jobs available but frequently with no potential for advancement. An additional issue for many graduates but also private firms themselves are the adaptations that are required to adhere to gender segregation laws within the country, something already in place in state institutions, which serves to make roles in such organisations desirable. However, if access to the labour market is to be widened for female graduates these areas will need to be overcome by state support and encouragement.

The Saudi Arabian response to this issue, which is embodied by its Employment Strategy, has been criticized by certain researchers such as Wadea (in Achoui, 2009), who asserts that “localization should not be on one-to-one basis but needs strategy” and policymaking that considers Labour market structure and human capital development (p. 36).

By evaluating the range of labour market theories and then considering them in light of the Saudi Arabian context, it has been further identified that there are clear contextual factors that define the Saudi labour market. These factors, which are mainly social and, therefore, also political economic, not only define the peculiar characteristics of the labour market, they also, crucially, mediate the impact and therefore, effectiveness of any policy interventions in the market including and, especially, the Saudisation programme. The constraining effects of social and authority relations that are supposedly sanctioned by Islam and enshrined into law on gender roles in general, more than anything else, seem to account for relative failure of labour market policy interventions in Saudi Arabia. This argument, however, does not entirely exonerate behaviours and attitudes of employers from blame for labour market failure in general, and, as discussed in Chapter 2, the failures of the Saudisation agenda.

The nature of social relations and the gender distribution and control over economic and social activities, including labour market participation, as enshrined, for example, in Saudisation policy, suggest that Institutional arguments about the labour market hold greater sway over the characteristics of the Saudi labour market. However, as also indicated earlier in this chapter, this is not to suggest that alternative neoclassical market theory is not relevant to the Saudi context. To the contrary, despite the overarching influence of the state and social factors over labour markets and labour market behaviours, Saudi employers also tend to operate from the unitarist perspective of the organisation. Accordingly, managers hold considerable discretion over the management of the internal labour market and, as a result, internal labour markets often manifest behaviour that is consistent with neoclassical market theory.

Consequently, while, for example, government investment in female education has fundamentally altered the nature of the external labour market in terms of female labour market participation, internal labour markets remain male dominated.

In that respect, internal labour markets seem to be in sync with the wider social context in terms of a number of cultural and social barriers in relation to female employment, despite the stated indication of the government that this needs to change. All of this has highlighted that this is a complex and potentially contentious area, which, this study assumes, can be addressed with a focus on imaginatively applying flexible HRM strategies and practices. Thus, the following chapter considers HRM in general and specifically, the role of flexibility in the internal labour market of firms in relation to their recruitment and training practices. In that regard, the chapter focuses especially on the changing labour market structure and the importance of considering flexible employment.

## CHAPTER 4 : LABOUR FLEXIBILITY AND HRM

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### 4.1: INTRODUCTION

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The chapter begins with a relatively brief account of broad concepts and debates about HRM as context for the analysis of internal labour market decisions and practices and how these are mediated by national institutional and regulatory frameworks and, social and cultural factors. This is alongside a discussion regarding contingency and *ad hoc* HRM strategies and practices of the firm in relation to their internal labour market. These involve a review of the literature on HRM in general and particularly with regard to the general goals of flexibility and commitment which, as identified earlier, may be pertinent strategies to encourage greater female participation in the Saudi labour market. This is also complemented by an overview of the specific issues of recruitment and selection, and employee retention strategies.

Discussion has already taken place in relation to the nature of the general theories and arguments about the nature and characteristics of the labour market and the related changes, including global trends. This has provided a brief account of regional characteristics and tendencies including the wider context of the Middle East. The focus on the Saudi Arabian context has provided data relating to labour market characteristics and patterns, incorporating discussion of the national institutional and regulatory framework that characterises and govern employment and employment practices in Saudi Arabia as well as the non-formal, indigenous frames of reference that also shape the employer/employee relations. These have been set into the framework of the impact of globalisation, including the role of MNCs, technology and social changes as well as access to higher education on labour market trends and employers' internal management strategies and practices in response.

## **Forms and context for flexible employment**

With respect to flexibility, the types and extent of labour market flexibility that exist are a direct result of the emergence of new ideas and practices about the management of people in organisational context. As such, understanding how these can be adopted in terms of internal HRM strategies and practices for improving their relationship with and achieving maximum benefit from, the labour markets (both internal and external) needs consideration.

This section therefore, having considered the context in which HRM emerged and the theoretical debates about what it entails and in that regard, whether, and to what extent HRM is different to personnel management, which until the 1980s was the theoretical description and explanation for how employees are managed, can now consider more contemporary issues and arguments about HRM such as strategic management of labour and the place of flexibility within this context.

The final part of this section goes on to consider some internal employee resourcing strategies and practices of firms. That discussion will focus on recruitment and selection and training and development. As indicated in the chapter outline, being that the central focus of the study concerns labour market entry problems for female graduates, the discussion necessarily is centred in literature on the recruitment and selection behaviours of firms and how that might contribute to the limited labour market access of women in light of their specific social status in general, but especially in Saudi Arabia. The focus on employee development is intended to provide the theoretical grounds on which to explore possible tensions between the NVET in light of what seems to be a contradiction in the significant state investment in women's higher education and the labour market opportunities that are available to these women.

The first aspect of this is to evaluate the overall notion of labour market flexibility in the context of HRM and labour market theories.

#### 4.2 CHANGING MARKETS AND FLEXIBILITY

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It is reasonable to argue that contemporary theories and practices of flexible employment have their genesis in the neoliberal argument that makes a strong association between regulation and poor performance (World Bank, 1993). In that regard, regulated labour markets are considered rigid and rigidity is viewed as a cause of poor economic performance. In Britain, labour market rigidity has been associated with and used by successive government since 1979, to restrict the ability and capacity of collective employee organisations – trade unions, to effectively represent their members (Farnham, 2015; Williams, 2014; Edwards, 2003; Farnham and Pimlott, 1995). The implications of this are that the trade unions became less influential (especially in the private sector), as a collective source of power that checks and resists bad managerial behaviour and poor employment relations. In effect, contemporary ideas and practices of flexible employment operate in a context of greater managerial prerogative.

Reed (2010) defines labour market flexibility in terms of four dimensions: *Wage flexibility*; *Employment flexibility*; *Management flexibility* and *Compositional flexibility*. In all these dimensions, labour market flexibility is essentially concerned with the idea of giving employers/management the freedom to unilaterally dictate the nature and terms and conditions of employment and the employment relationship. In that regard, Wage flexibility concerns the freedom to adjust pay in response to whatever management considers being the market situation at any material time. Although Reed defines *Employment flexibility* as “the extent to which workers are free to adjust employment, and to choose whether to work or not, and how many hours to work” (p.4), Procter and



Ackroyd (2009) have argued that flexibility is something that is almost always expected of the employee for the purposes of the employer. Procter and Ackroyd's (ibid) analysis is even more applicable to the notion of Management flexibility, which refers to the extent that managers have the freedom to unilaterally deploy labour and manage the employment relationship (Reed, 2010, p. 4). The final dimension, Compositional flexibility, which refers to vary labour on geographical criteria, is much more consistent with the objectives of outsourcing and "fragmentation of the employment relationship" (ACAS, 2012).

It follows from the preceding discussion that at the level of the four dimensions, the idea of flexible labour markets is consistent with the free market principles of neoclassical economic theory and the unitarist ideology that underpins HRM as an idea and practice (Redman and Wilkinson, 2002; Purcell, 1999). Notwithstanding the powerful and some empirically supported arguments as it (which will be brought up later), advocates have generally attempted to argue for flexible labour market policies and strategies generally from macroeconomic points of view about productivity and employment creation (HM Treasury, 2003; World Bank, 1993; Moore, 1997).

Accordingly, at the national level, in the UK for example, the argument for flexibility of the labour market is that it is a strategy for achieving low unemployment, low inflation and, ultimately economic competitiveness (HM Treasury 2003, p. 10). Following Reed's framework, in policy and practical terms, labour market flexibility manifests in legislation that generally targets labour market institutions actors that are considered to be the cause of the rigidity that associated with poor economic performance. Specifically, therefore, in Britain, trade unions have been the focus of restrictive labour laws that constrain their ability to organise and take legitimately acceptable action on behalf of their members (Farnham and Pimlott, 1995; Ironside and Seifert, 2004; Bach, 2010).

Some of the neoliberal arguments for such a restrictive application of the law rest on arguments that association in trade unions leads to high wages and the resultant consequence of increase in unemployment. Writers such as Hayek (1984) took the argument further, suggesting that higher wages resulting from union immunities and closed shop had a domino effect in creating unemployment, with the displaced workers putting further pressure on the labour market and downward pressure on wages to the extent that it became more beneficial to be on benefits than be employed. The restrictive application of the law (Kahn-Freund, 1977, in Rose, 2008) as a mechanism for labour market deregulation has not only skewed the pay/effort bargain in favour of employers, the degradation of unions have shifted the balance of power to the extent that employers and managements are much more focused on matters of productivity at the expense of good employment relations, a situation, which, according to Storey (2001) defined the context for the introduction of HRM in Britain.

Increased productivity and performance are perhaps the most expressed arguments for deregulation and labour market flexibility as well as, justification for punitive trade union legislation and precarious atypical forms of employment such as casualization, agency, and temporal and part-time work. All of which have been on the increase since the 1980s (IPPR, 2014; Kersley et al. 2004 in Bach, 2005). Advocates of labour market deregulation such as Moore (1997) argue that though inequality in bargaining power between the parties justifies deregulation, there is nothing that is so unique about labour markets that should exempt them from deregulation like other factor markets. He goes on to argue that the fear of monopoly as a result of deregulation is unlikely in modern economies.

The World Bank (1993) argues for labour market flexibility by outlining what it claims are the adverse consequences of labour market regulation. It argues that: “Labour market policies like minimum wages, job security regulation, and social security are usually intended to raise welfare, or reduce exploitation. But they actually work to raise the cost of labour in the formal sector and reduce labour demand... increase the supply of labour to the rural and urban informal sectors, and thus depress labour incomes where most of the poor are found” (p. 63).

These claims and other positive implications that are associated with labour market flexibility and increases in flexibility are, however, contested (Vidal, 2013; Reed, 2010). The claims of increased performance, for example, Reed analysed the correlations between flexible labour markets against four indicators of performance and concluded that, among other things; that countries with co-ordinated wage bargaining systems have lower unemployment and the correlations between high levels of employment protection and generous unemployment benefit systems and unemployment are, generally, inconclusive. Further, he claims recent studies have found a positive correlation between employment protection regulation and growth and, citing Monastiriotis (2006), he argues “that regional comparison using regressing regional unemployment levels on various flexibility indicators suggest that flexibility is *positively* associated with unemployment” (2010, pp. 7-8).

In terms implications for employees, although governments and employers view them as having a positive impact on national and business performance as well as an improved work-life balance (HM Treasury, 2003). Some view them as the low road in employment opportunity and terms and conditions for workers (Kline, 2000; Legge, 2005; Procter and Ackroyd, 2009).

Apart from the arguments about the implications of flexible employment practices for national economic and corporate performance, and employees' terms and conditions, critiques of flexibility also focus on the incompatibility of the dual goals of flexibility and commitment which are each central to all analysis of HRM. Yet, that dual objective, which is clearly expressed in Guest's (1987) suggestion that "Organisational flexibility and flexibility in job design require 'high organisational commitment, high trust and high levels of intrinsic motivations'" (Guest, 1987, p. 514), presents unambiguous evidence of flexibility as a HRM 'policy goal along with strategic integration, commitment and quality (ibid).

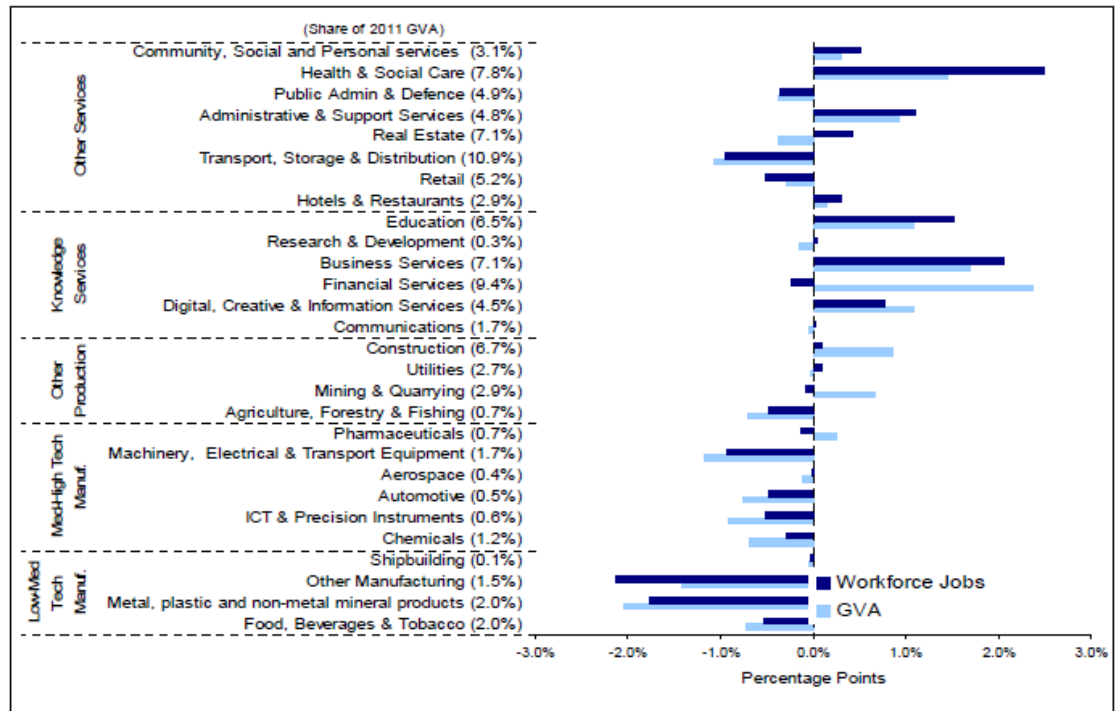
The question at the centre of such criticisms is whether and to what extent managers can and should expect commitment described "as an individual's identification, involvement and loyalty to the employing organization... [Differently] conceptualized as an attitude or a behavioural investment..." (Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2002, p. 82) on the part of employees who are not guaranteed the minimum protection of job security by the employer organisation (see Atkinson's model, 1984).

Broadly speaking and in the context of this thesis, there are two core questions that this research thus seeks to address. First, can flexible labour market policies and practices that characterise the UK labour market help to address the potential female graduate problems that Saudi Arabia may have to confront in the future? Second, bearing in mind the relatively alien nature of flexible employment practices in the formal sector in Saudi Arabia, is it possible to inspire employees in flexible employment, especially in light of the precarious nature of such employment, "to go beyond contract" (Storey, 1989) and identify with the "more or less homogenous value system" (Tayeb, 1996: 189) of the organisation.

These questions are set in the theoretical and commercial reality of changes in the labour market and the implications of these for employment in general, but also understanding internal HRM strategies and practices of firms in relation to employee resourcing. This approach of flexibility, as noted by Bernal-Verdugo *et al.* (2012), is one way to address issues of unemployment, particularly that of female unemployment. By offering flexible working practices, entry to the labour market is facilitated and has a concurrent impact on the economy and thus standard of living in a country such as Saudi Arabia.

This trend for more flexible working patterns and increases in female participation within the global workforce, but particularly in Saudi Arabia is just one example of the structural changes that have occurred within the global labour market. To indicate the depth of these a description of the situation in the UK and Europe in regard to these changes is provided to illustrate how a similar process can occur in Saudi Arabia. In particular, as Figure 4.1 indicates, the changes in specific industries have been one of the major changes seen in the UK in terms of contribution to the economy.

FIGURE 4.1: SECTORIAL CHANGES IN EMPLOYMENT IN THE UK



Source: Department for Business and Skills (2012)

Figure 4.1 provide more recent indications of structural changes in the British economy represented by significant declines in the previously dominant manufacturing and mining sectors and major increases in the service sector, which now dominate the GDP of the country, and account for around 8 out of every 10 jobs. This underlines the restructuring that the labour market has undergone as a result of economic factor, and in particular the rapid decline of the manufacturing industry which was vulnerable to competition following the influx of goods from new economies as part of the overall globalisation process. The decline in manufacturing sector in Britain, as in most developed industrialised economies, reflects organisations reaction to the unprecedented intensity in levels and diversity of sources of competition due to increased globalisation. Bach (2005) notes the declining manufacturing sector employment in Britain reflects increasing off shoring of manufacturing jobs and operations as organisations search for efficiencies in production costs to enable them to remain competitive.

The structural shift from manufacturing to service dominated economy also underlines the increasingly customer oriented strategy of businesses as most manufacturing shifts to emerging and developing economies mainly of East and South East Asia. The importance of this for Saudi Arabia is due to the shift the country has experienced from fragmented agricultural production to oil based industries indicated in the background section, which while focused on different industries reflects the need for a skills change in the local and national labour force in the same way that the UK labour market focus on manufacturing skills had to be adapted to meet the new service dominant logic.

Contemporary data also reflects an upward trend in the uptake in temporary employment in the United States. Data from the US Labour Department, for example, shows that temporary employment agencies in the United States employed, on average, 3 million temporary workers and short term contract workers per day in 2011, which represented an increase of about 10% on the 2010 figure (U.S Department of Labour, 2012). Overall, about 13 million Americans were employed through temporary employment agencies in 2011 (ibid). Underlining the importance of this mode of employment is the fact that although most temporary work was traditionally in the farming sector, there has been a significant increase in non-farm temporary agency employment in the United States in recent years accounting for 10% of labour market participants in 2010 and showing as a major labour market route since 2009.

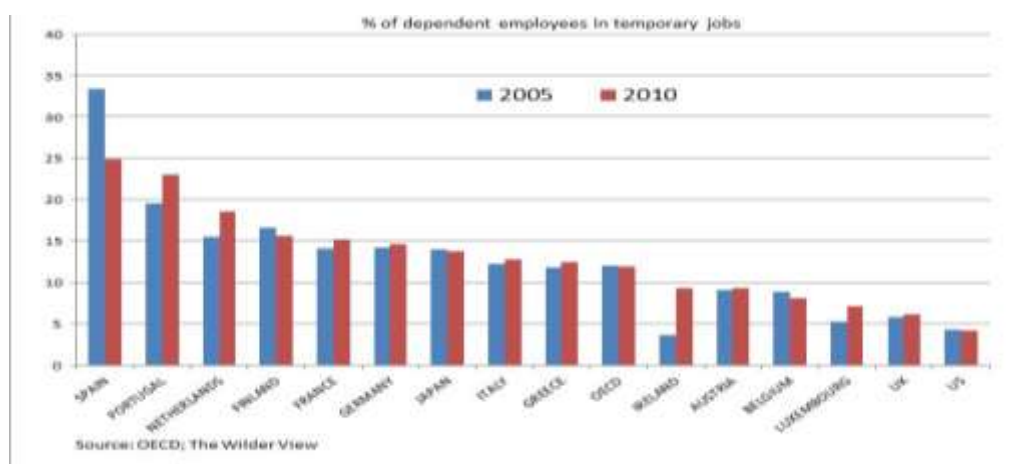
Proponents of this form of employment suggest that the trend is likely to continue and even accelerate as temporary agency work becomes a major route for many Americans back to work as the US economy improves after the recession and is a new form of work contract for many (McDowell and Christopherson, 2009). As evidence, they point to data that shows that the temporary employment sector has generated an annual income of almost \$100 billion in 2011, which is equal to about a 12.5% increase.

Any increase in the significance of this type of employment in the United States, is, however not matched by any serious concerns about its precarious nature. Sweeney (2006) noted that the sector is “essentially unregulated in terms of any operational constraints” (p.2) and effort by unions and other NGO actors for regulation has so far not received any sympathetic hearing from Federal and/or State governments. Although Unions and other advocates have had some success in pushing for some benefits, mainly in terms of healthcare, Sweeney notes that there has been little success at the Federal level. He cites the failure of “a number of congressional measures ... aimed to *inter alia*, extend health and safety protection to temporary agency workers and outlaw pay discrimination against them” to attract enough support in Congress as evidence of lack of political will to regulate the sector and provide reasonable terms and conditions (p. 6).

This view is also held by MacEachen *et al.* (2012) who noted that responsibility for safety and pay regulations is often passed onto the contractor of the agency, rather than being borne by the agency itself. In a Saudi context, trade union presence is not as widespread as in developed countries, and thus the role of collective voice in the labour market needs to be viewed within the cultural context of the Middle East and the issues faced by companies in relation to their relationships with MNCs, which are discussed later in the paper. In the context of the USA, the regulations indicated above were a response to the situation shown in Figure 4.2, which shows that temporary employment work made up a significant amount of non-typical forms of employment in the EU in the 1990s, a trend that is continuing.



FIGURE 4.2: TEMP AGENCY EMPLOYMENT - EUROPE AND USA



Source: Wilder (2012)

As Figure 4.2 indicates, in the majority of EU countries there has been growth in the numbers of individuals taking on temporary employment. There appear to be two main reasons for this. One is the increasing number of females entering the job market to supplement family incomes, but also the rise in service sector industries which operate on a part-time flexible employment basis (Kruppe *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, as Faccini (2013) highlights, employers are using short term and temporary contracts as means of screening potential employees and effectively bringing them into the internal labour market but without commitment, allowing them to widen their pool of human resources but maintaining control over costs and training. This situation has parallels within the Saudi context and further underlines the need for government involvement and encouragement for flexible working patterns to encourage greater participation of females in the labour market.

According to the European Working Conditions Observatory (EWCO, 2007), Temporary Agency work accounted for 2% of atypical employment in the fifteen EU member countries in 2000. Whilst it is likely that this figure has increased, based on the findings of the OECD reported by Wilder (2012), no new data has been released to date by EWCO.

However, indications from the office of national statistics suggest there has been a major climb in temporary workers in the UK particularly as Figure 4.3 indicates.

FIGURE 4.3: TEMPORARY WORKERS IN THE UK

### Part-time working has increased as employers reduce working hours and tighten full-time hiring



Source: Office for National Statistics (2013).

What is particularly of interest for this work are the reasons behind taking temporary employment with the largest factor being that of not wishing to take a full time job, indicating a need for a work life balance amongst those in the UK labour market, followed by the 18% who were unable to find a full time job. This has possible resonance for Saudi female graduates who may require the same balance. This perspective has some clear ramifications for the Saudi labour market, as there is a potential that females wishing to participate in the labour market may also wish to balance this with their family responsibilities. In addition and in relation to the productivity argument for flexibility, some of HRM literature also advance work life balance as an argument for flexible employment practices.

Although an exact definition is hard to come by (Gatrell and Cooper, 2008; Gregory and Milner, 2009), Felstead et al (2002) have generally defined Work life balance as being concerned with the separation of the times and spaces of work, specifically paid work and distributed and non-work matters (Felstead et al., 2002). Notwithstanding, the issues about work life balance have become a major concern with the increase in the reality and perceptions of and about work intensification and this concerns for a balance between work and family life and responsibilities is also reflected related increase in policy pronouncement (French, 2005; French and Daniels, 2006). In terms of relevance of flexibility to these concerns, some have argued that flexibility provides the means for employees to cope with not only changing business circumstances, but to also to manage these in light of the demands from non-work commitments (Kotler and Keller, 2006). Bone, for example goes so far as to suggest that “flexibility is presented as a desirable, progressive trend, increasing workers’ autonomy and providing more stimulating work, while injecting a pro-social dimension into employment practices, enhancing both employees’ lives and company performances through improved worker commitment and productivity” (2006, p. 110). However, both Nolan et al (2000) and Ward et al (2001) have dismissed such argument as defective on the grounds that they tend to fail to factor in the context and circumstances of those in such employment.

Crush (2011) suggests that temporary workers form, in some sectors, around 35% of the work force in the UK. What the trend to temporary employment indicates, and the potential reason behind this as indicated by what pertains in the UK, is that agency work may be seen in the future as the main means of entry to the labour market for some individuals who do not wish or are unable to commit to a full-time employment role (Jahn and Rosholm, 2014). From the Saudi perspective and in relation to this study therefore, there is a suggestion that the development of temporary employment contracts may contribute to greater participation by females in the labour market.

It should, however, be noted that despite its increasing importance, there remain arguments that Agency work is a precarious form of employment that puts the risks related to employment from the organisation to the individual (Kalleberg, 2009). However, unlike the United States, there have been successful efforts in the EU to regulate this form of employment and provide some minimum guarantees of employment security and safety to individuals in this form of employment (Slater and Forde, 2014). After the initial failure of the social partners to reach a framework agreement to regulate temporary agency work in 2001, the EU Commission proposed a Directive on Equal Treatment of Temporary Agency Workers that would allow them to receive equal pay and basic working conditions to permanent workers carrying out the same or similar jobs in host companies. After another failure to see the Directive through legislation, in 2008 the partners reached agreements that facilitated the adoption of the Directives by EU Parliament (EWCO) (ibid.; Wynn, 2014).

In the UK specifically, this resulted in steps being taken to resolve some of these labour market uncertainties with the introduction, in October 2011 of the Agency Working Regulations, which aim to diminish some of the disparities in working conditions between those who are in the flexible agency environment and those who are in permanent employment (UK Government, 2011). In the context of Saudi Arabia therefore, and returning to the intervention of the state in the labour market, if the participation of females in the labour market is to be achieved at least partially through encouragement of temporary contracts, there is an indication that this should be underpinned by state regulation of the industry and provision of protection for workers and their rights.

The figures on flexible employment also bear out the increasing use of temporary agency work and other forms of flexible employment in selected developed economies since early 1990s.

A 2011 Report prepared by ONS for the HSE shows consistency in the overall proportion of individuals of working age doing shift work since 1990s. The data indicates that men continue to be the most likely to engage in shift work, with the vast majority being in Personal protection, transport, health and communication sectors (HSE, 2011). The UK data is consistent with the US in terms of gender, with a higher percentage of men reporting to be doing shift work than women (US Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2004). However, the 4<sup>th</sup> EU Survey on Working Conditions (2004) shows very little difference between men and women with 17.2% and 17.4 % respectively reporting to be engaged in shift work.

Although, like with most other forms of flexible employment, proponents of shift work are quick to emphasise its positive effects in terms of flexi-time, the increase in shift work, marginal as it may be, also reflects an increasing tendency towards flexible use of labour that tends to emphasise its positives, including potential ‘work-life balance’ quality at the expense of the precarious nature of such work. For example, a number of health-related problems have been associated with shift work, including “psychosomatic disorders of the gastrointestinal tract and the cardiovascular system” with behavioural problems (Knutsson, 2003). Waterhouse et al. (1992) reported that significant numbers of people tend to stop doing shift work after a short period due to serious health problems, and even more significantly show ill health in later life that can be attributable to shift work. To the extent that it constitutes a form of flexibility, Vogel *et al.* (2012) indicate that shift work can be disruptive to normal patterns of sleep and the natural body clock, with long-term adverse health consequences. It should however be recognised that these studies are predominantly focused on those who have a rotating shift pattern that consists of days, nights and weekends, rather than those in flexible employment who may work fewer hours or are on a standard shift pattern.

All of these factors appear to confirm the increase in temporary employment in many advanced developed market economies, including many OECD countries' increasing concerns about job insecurity (OECD, 2002). The arguments for the benefits of these forms of employment in terms of individuals' and employers' increased demand for flexibility in working patterns for any number of reasons (OECD, 1999), are, however, overshadowed by concerns that an increase in the adoption of temporary contracts as part of the labour market, may lead to increased segmentation within the labour market, reduced employment security and few opportunities for advancement, (Silva and Vasquez-Grenno, 2013).

This view is however disputed by Gebel (2010) who found that in Germany and the UK, entering the labour market through temporary employment routes was not a long term precursor to difficulties in obtaining permanent employment but that upward mobility in the labour market was grounded in skills and education ability. Rather, this was based on acquired skills. This suggests that there has been a move away from viewing temporary contracts at the lower end of the labour market and that flexible contracts are now more acceptable routes into the labour market, particularly for women as Chen and Corcoran (2010) note. These more contemporary perspectives thus indicate that as the labour market has changed, so too have societal and employer attitudes, recognising that temporary employment is an effective way of gaining entry to the labour market and supporting the economy. Therefore, to the extent that individuals can develop skills and knowledge through such atypical employment, flexible forms of employment can be useful for way for enhancing ones human capital and thereby improve their labour market potential.

In the context of Saudi Arabia therefore, which is developing its own national human capital in terms of providing greater levels of education particularly for women, there is a potential lesson and a way forward for their own labour market, when looking at the

processes and evolution of the labour market in the developed countries indicated above. In addition, it is also pertinent to consider some of the reasons behind these changes and evaluate whether there is a contextual validity in the Saudi situation. The reasons behind the changes that have occurred within the labour markets of developed, and to a lesser extent, developing countries are based, as already indicated on economic structural changes within the particular countries. However, the labour market in a global sense has clearly seen an effect from globalisation and the opening of trade links between different regions which has made international mobility easier and more accessible than ever before. A country such as Saudi Arabia which has had a high degree of foreign involvement in its business, with numerous MNCs now operating in the region, is thus highly impacted by this process and this therefore needs consideration in relation to its current aims for the labour market.

#### **4.2.1 Flexibility and Flexible Labour Market with Reference to Saudi Arabia**

Labour market flexibility is defined in terms of, “*how labour markets function*” in relation to the extension to which management can unilaterally determine wages, vary the composition of work force, and assert control over the employment relationship (Reed, 2010). The claims of flexible labour markets are that they constitute efficiency, which “implies higher employment, and so an economy that is fairer as well as more competitive and more productive” (HM treasury, 2003: 1). It also implies an economy that is better able to adapt to the changing economic environment (Nolan and Slater, 2003). In addition, the flexibility of the labour market is a primary factor in the determination of the overall performance of an economy and a low level of flexibility is reported as likely to be “more costly within EMU than outside it...” (HM Treasury, 2003, p.1).

Labour market flexibility has thus been variously defined. Some define it “as the speed with which the labour market can adjust in response to an economic shock” *ibid*.

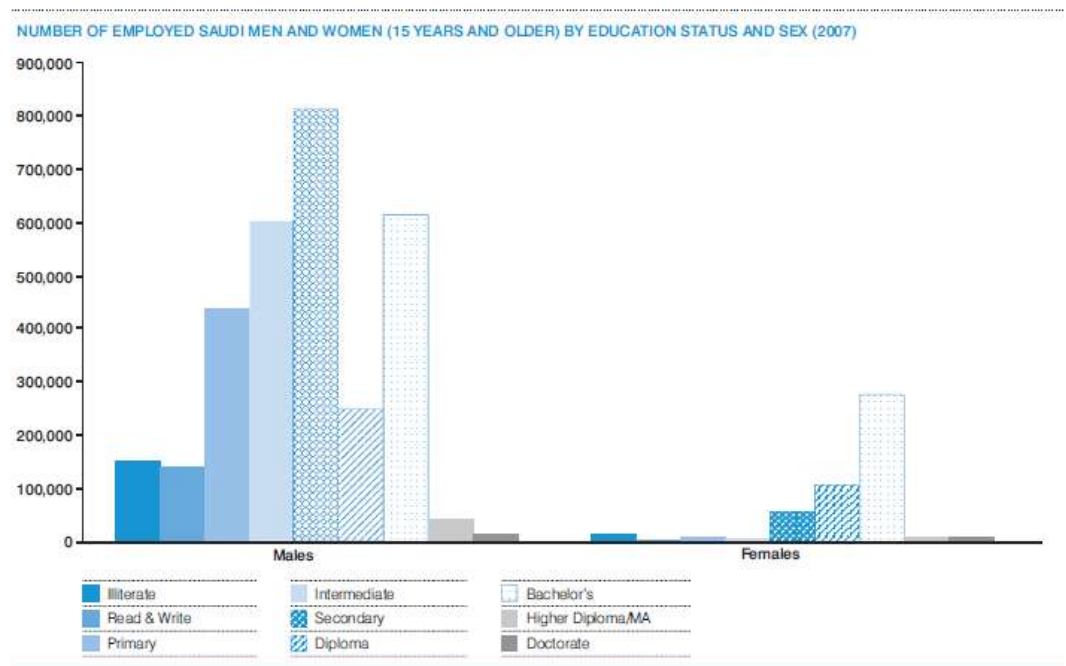
Still others define a flexible labour market as “one that exhibits a good equilibrium...or characterize it in terms of the institutional features that influence wage setting and supply and demand in the labour market and ultimately labour market performance” (ibid). Flexibility is stated to be a concept that is difficult “to quantify and therefore to test numerically” (HM Treasury, 2002, p.1).

The prior indications about the labour market in Saudi Arabia in regard to the high number of expatriates, low female participation and reluctance of Saudi males to work in what they view as demeaning jobs, shows major challenges for the government in its attempts to achieve its Saudisation aims, and potentially introduce flexible working practices. However, this does not mean that it is not possible, or achievable. What it does mean is that there needs to be clear understanding about the development of skills for the labour market in the Kingdom and how they can best be deployed. Taking the experiences of both developed and developing countries therefore suggests that there is a potential for flexible working practices to be one route for achieving higher employment levels and labour market entry points for female graduates.

Currently, as Figure 4.4 indicates and in line with earlier sections on female participation in the labour market, the percentage of females based on education levels of those employed is minimal compared to that of males.



FIGURE 4.4: MALE VS FEMALE EMPLOYMENT LEVELS BY QUALIFICATION



Source: Booz and Co. (2010)

At the same time, many educated women are looking to enter the job market, as the fact that of the 1.6 million people claiming the jobseekers stipend in the country, 1.2 million are women and 40% of these are holders of graduate degrees (Alkhudair, 2013). However, as Booz and Co. (2010) highlight, it is not just state or employer barriers that prevent entry to the market. For some women, the selectiveness of the jobs they will consider also plays a part, with graduates refusing to take unskilled or low paying work. This is one of the reasons they wish to work in the public sector, and indeed some 95% of the Saudi females in the labour market are employed in this sector, frequently in education, in either a teaching or administrative capacity. At the same time educated Saudi women are now starting to create their own opportunities by setting up businesses and investments (Yamani, 2005). It should however be recognised also that whilst the requirement for male guardian permission for this activity has been removed, the practice still remains in many areas, affecting the sectors in which women can operate autonomously as Welsh *et al.* (2013) note.

This has however been supported by initiatives from the state to encourage working from home practices in fields such as dressmaking, hairdressing and beauty treatments (Council of Saudi Chambers, 2014).

In the context of encouraging Saudis, and especially females, to enter the private sector, the work of Al-Shammari (2009), entitled “Saudisation and Skill Formation for Employment in the Private Sector”, reports that “since the late 1980s, (the lack of motivation to work in the private sector) has generated high rates of unemployment among Saudis as government employment has reached its peak and the private sector continues to recruit millions of cheap migrant workers to increase its profits and competitiveness. This is creating an unbalanced labour market structure as well as economic, political, and social problems” (ibid, p.iii). A number of government initiatives have been introduced to rectify this dilemma, but many of these have been generally aimed at Saudi nationals in general, rather than specifically at lowering the unemployment rates of Saudi female graduates which is still climbing, as highlighted in earlier sections of the work (Al-Shetaiwi, 2012).

One of these as previously indicated is the process of Saudisation to replace the country’s 4.7 million migrant workers expatriates recruited mainly (95%) to the private sector, with as many qualified Saudis as possible. However, such efforts have not yet produced fruitful results as the private sector is still recruiting expatriates and as skill formation systems are still producing Saudis with “incompatible skills, knowledge, and attitudes for the private labour market’s needs” (p.iv). According to Al-Shammari, the government employs its nationals in jobs for the government at reasonable rates of pay as stated by Al-Humaid (2005) and even more importantly, those workers are given employment security for their working lifespan, and the government’s promotion system is based on longevity of employment instead of on performance.

This approach ties in with the cultural values of hierarchy, respect and tradition. In addition, these employees are given flexible housing loans as well as free education and health care.

In contrast, the private sector has continued and even increased its recruitment of expatriates in various industries, thereby evading the recruitment of Saudis who are reported, as viewed by managers, “to be costly to recruit, retain, and develop” (Al-Shammari, 2009, p.2). In addition, Saudi nationals are believed to be ill equipped in the necessary “skills, knowledge and attitudes” when compared to labour market demands, and to be qualified for office and administrative jobs only, representing the minority of the needs of the labour force.

Al-Shammari further states, supported by Torofdar (2011), that the research reported in his study contains two assumptions: firstly, the heavy involvement of the government in control of different aspects of skill formation systems is the primary challenge in combating the ineffective and slow response to the manpower needs and Saudisation in the private labour market. This involvement results in the rigid bureaucracy of the government being imposed on a “very dynamic, flexible, and self-sufficient economy like the private market in Saudi Arabia that is operating in a very competition and changeable environment. The second assumption is that from all appearances, GOTEVT is unable to produce graduates with the skills required by the private sector and unable to reduce unemployment among Saudis” (Al-Shammari, 2009, p.4). Despite these difficulties and challenges, the process of Saudisation is still moving forward, and in this respect there are a number of institutions who heavily involved in supporting the labour market.

According to The Institute of labour Research (2002, in Elias and Purcell, 2003), the primary bodies that interact with the labour market in Saudi Arabia are as follows:

1. Workers who are either employed or jobseekers and who possess skills, experience, and qualifications.
2. Enterprise owners with their immediate and future quantity and quality demands of workers.
3. The government sector, which is not only a major employer of Saudi manpower, but also an influential regulator, investor, economic planner and social insurer (Al-Shammari, 2009, p.29).

Two government organizations have been established to supervise these interactions:

- (1) The Ministry of Labour; and
- (2) The Ministry of Civil Services (Al-Shammari, 2009, p.29).

The first of these agencies is responsible for planning and development of manpower as well as labour relations, disputes, visas and general monitoring. Also, this agency is reported to act as “chairperson of the General Organization for Social Insurance, General Organization for Technical Education and Vocational Training (GOTEVT), and the HRD Fund” (ibid, p.29).

The second agency conducts planning for “the civil manpower required in the government sector and ensures that the competence of civil servants matches the requirements of the Kingdom as it implements its various development programs” (ibid, p. 30). Al-Shammari reports that Saudisation and vocational training were a priority in the Sixth Development Plan (1999) and the Kingdom provided encouragement for increased participation from the private sector in the Kingdom’s economy, resulting in the increase in Saudi labour to 44.2% of the total labour force.

The Seventh Development Plan statistics “point to an increase in the total labour force from 7.23 million workers in 2000 to about 8.27 million workers in 2003 at an annual growth rate of 3.4%. This resulted in 1.04 million new openings during the same period, 56.4% of which were filled by national manpower” (ibid, p.31). Al-Shammari reports that the Eighth Development Plan from 2005-09 predicted an increase in the average growth rate of the Saudi workforce of 5.13% if the objective of the plan were met for participation of Saudi nationals in the workforce (ibid, p.32).

This work suggests that whilst the government has ambitious plans for increasing the national labour force and thus tackling the problems of unemployment and high expatriate worker numbers, there are issues that need to be resolved in terms of skills, expectations of MNCs and Saudi nationals in relation to their views of job importance and benefits but also in relation to skills training and development. As such there are a number of specific limitations to the analysis of the Saudi labour market, with particular reference to flexibility and the increased deployment of female graduates. Furthermore, in 2011 an update on the Saudisation process occurred with the introduction of the unpopular Nitaqat, the legal requirement for levels of Saudi nationals within organisations with pre-specified numbers of employees, and Khazinder (2013) notes that there has been low success with this and that potentially this means that the Saudisation process is focused on the wrong areas, including focusing on university rather than technical college levels of education.

Having discussed flexibility in conceptual terms, with some references to specific national context, the next subsection provides a brief review of flexibility and flexible employment in the context specific regions/countries. The objective for this is not to underscore the global appeal of the ideas regardless of its adverse consequences for both economic output and employment relations (Reed, 2010; Legge, 2005; Procter and Ackroyd, 2009).

Rather, it is intended to establish the platform for comparative exploration of the idea of flexible employment and its feasibility as a solution to the employment problems among Saudi female graduates.

#### **4.2.2 Labour Market Flexibility in Global Perspective**

Labour market flexibility can be best appreciated with an overall global perspective on the problem. This includes research from the Americas, Asia, Africa, and Europe as well as Australia. These differing views offer perspective on how Saudi Arabia can best implement labour market flexibility and what forms of regulation or other practice may be useful in this regard.

There have been a number of studies that compare labour market flexibility and regimes across multiple regions. One study compared labour market flexibility across the 21 Organisations for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries using a panel approach, with data from 1984 to 1990 (Di Tella & MacCulloch, 2005). This study found that increased labour market flexibility was associated with increased employment levels; particularly, comparison of the most flexible market (the United States) and least flexible market (France) indicated that adjustment of French labour market rules to be as flexible as the United States could lower unemployment by 1.6% (Di Tella & MacCulloch, 2005).

These effects were seen both in short-run unemployment rates and in rates of long-term unemployment or persistent unemployment. This suggests that there are significant gains to be had in adjustment of labour market rules to be more flexible. Furthermore, the study indicated that marginal groups (especially women) were likely to benefit more from labour market flexibility, indicating that increased labour market flexibility has the ability to increase labour market equity.

This appears to underline the potential benefits of labour flexibility in the Saudi context for female graduates. However, these findings were rejected by a more recent study, which found that labour market regulation was associated with an increased rate of economic growth and stability (Storm & Naastepad, 2009). In particular, the authors found that the OECD Nordic countries, which are strongest in terms of worker protections, are the most effective economies in terms of worker productivity (Storm & Naastepad, 2009). They also do not recognize the effect of increased unemployment that is seen in other situations (Storm & Naastepad, 2009). This could be attributable to the adoption of so-called “flexicurity” regimes, in which strong workers protections are balanced with allowance for short-term, contract, and casual work (Viebrock & Clasen, 2009). These approaches are intended to provide state support for flexible working while still retaining worker capability.

A study across developing countries in varying regions, including Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Europe, also found that reduced labour market flexibility was associated with higher levels of unemployment as well as higher participation in the informal sector (Djankov & Ramalho, 2009). However, not all developing countries have used the same approach to controlling labour markets; while African and Asian developing countries have largely been working to increase labour market flexibility. South American countries have been reducing labour market flexibility. These choices could be due to shifting priorities for development and increased preference for worker protections. However, they have all have a potential salience for the development of flexibility within the Saudi labour market, highlighting potential pitfalls and disadvantages so that measures can be put in place to prevent these occurring in the Kingdom and maximising the benefits of flexibility.

An international study of labour market flexibility found significant differences between Scandinavian regions and central Europe on the one hand and English-speaking countries (including Great Britain, Republic of Ireland, and the current and former Commonwealth countries and the United States on the other hand; Kahn, 2012). This suggests that there are clear regional variations which may, referring again to the radical institutional theory of the labour market, highlight the underlying importance of cultural and social factors in shaping the market, which has resonance for this study and the potential of flexibility to encourage higher rates of participation by female Saudi graduates.

This study found that on average, English-speaking countries have significantly higher rates of labour market flexibility and maintain more open labour markets, as compared to Scandinavian and Central European countries, which take a strong approach to worker protection (Kahn, 2012). This factor is of potential interest given that English is frequently the language of business in Saudi Arabia as noted in the background section of this work. This shows that even within a single region there can be widely varying labour market flexibility approaches and outcomes. From the perspective of Saudi Arabia therefore, there is a suggestion that different governances may adopt variable approaches to the adoption of flexible working patterns, even with state intervention to encourage the practice.

Overall, institutional heterogeneity and a high degree of geographical flexibility within Europe have tended to increase skills-related inequalities, as high-skilled workers can move in order to take advantage of a competitive regulatory regime, while low-skilled workers cannot do so (Gebel & Giesecke, 2011). Another study identified the nature of competition in product markets as one of the main differences in OECD countries in terms of numerical flexibility and time flexibility, especially in terms of worker turnover and employment change (Black, Gospel, & Pendleton, 2008).



Cross-regional studies have also shown that there are significant legal and regulatory issues to be considered when planning labour market flexibility. One study compared the performance of the civil court system across OECD countries (Hefeker & Neugart, 2010). This study found that countries with civil law systems had more certainty regarding the implementation of labour market reforms as compared to those that relied on courts to interpret the changes put into place in law. Furthermore, this study found that legal reform was more likely to occur in countries that implement labour market reforms through courts, given that there was more uncertainty involved in this process. This indicates that a more active reform is likely to be required in a court-based system than in a civil law system. The specific outcomes for various regions of the world are provided below.

### **Europe**

There are marked differences in European economies in terms of labour markets. A cross-European study conducted in six countries with widely varying institutional conditions suggests that effects on firm growth and use of flexible labour markets is dependent on national institutions, such as regulations, laws, and policies as well as national culture (Schief, 2010). This effect was also seen within the cross-national employment of multinational corporations, suggesting that the country in which employment is occurring is highly significant. Furthermore, there are significant differences in the degree of labour market flexibility in Europe, with Visegrad alliance countries (Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic) having a significantly higher level of labour market flexibility than the fifteen so-called old EU member states (Tvrdon, 2007). As noted above this regional variation suggests that modelling a flexibility model for Saudi Arabia on a European or other regional model may not be appropriate but that there is a need to develop an appropriate Saudi model which reflects not only the need for flexibility but also observance of the country's own cultural values and religious beliefs.

The differences noted in the European context do however create some potential advantages for these newer countries, which remain competitive due to less expensive and more flexible labour (Tvrdon, 2007). These differences can particularly be seen in collective bargaining tactics and labour taxation, as well as unemployment benefits, especially duration and net earnings replacement. Furthermore, a study of Eurozone-wide labour market flexibility has shown that specific types of flexibility, especially wage flexibility, have significant implications for the development of monetary policy (Christoffel, Kuester, & Linzert, 2009). This study found that wage flexibility increased the effects of monetary policy, allowing for better management of inflation and reduction of the impact of economic shocks. This suggests that for Saudi there is a need to evaluate which approach to flexibility best suits their economy and overall Saudisation aims. Given the concerns of Saudi employers about the costs involved with hiring Saudi nationals (De Bel-Air, 2014), wage flexibility may not be the most viable but understanding the impact can provide valuable learning for the state and policy makers in relation to the potential viability of flexibility approaches.

A study from the UK looked at the effect of labour market flexibility using a survey of 1,800 firms currently involved in the UK economy or in other words who were involved in sending FDI inflows to the UK (Whyman & Baimbridge, 2006). This study found that 60% of FDI-sending firms found that labour market flexibility was moderately or highly important to the firms that were engaged in FDI. This could be crucial for Saudi Arabia where there is a high level of foreign multi-nationals operating in the Kingdom and suggests that flexibility within these firms would be a positive move to encourage greater labour market participation from nationals, particularly female graduates who will want to balance their home and religious life with working. Importantly in this context, the Whyman and Baimbridge study also found that multiple types of flexibility, including working hours and wages as well as skills (especially multi-skilled and rapidly re-skilling)

were important elements of flexibility for the UK workforce (Whyman & Baimbridge, 2006).

A second study in the UK compares the labour market flexibility to the surrounding European Monetary Union (EMU) countries. This study focused on wage flexibility, labour mobility, employment flexibility, and functional flexibility (the ability to acquire new skills). In this study, a relatively low human development, with little development of high skills as compared to the number of low-skilled workers, was seen to contribute to labour market inflexibility and reduce competitiveness (HM Treasury, 2003). As just one of the Gulf States which are working towards a greater level of participation in the labour market of the national workforce and of females, this suggests that in order to compete with their gulf neighbours using flexibility to increase competition, education and skills improvement will be an important underpinning.

In terms of firm-level advantage, a third study found that externally flexible labour had a negative effect on innovation and development within the firm (Michie & Sheehan, 2005). The authors defined external flexibility as traditional wage, hour, skill, and geographic labour market flexibility, while internal flexibility was defined as the ability to do many jobs within the firm. This shows that for any given firm, labour market flexibility may or may not be an advantage.

Furthermore, in Europe there can be difficulties in matching internal regulations and EU requirements. This can be demonstrated by the case of Poland, which recently reformed its Labour Code in order to improve labour flexibility and liberalise it, especially in terms of wages and hours and contract work. However, although this reform resulted in a reduction in unemployment, it will need to be further redesigned in order to comply with EU requirements on worker protections (Ingham & Ingham, 2011).

Thus, managing the multiple regulatory requirements within the EU poses a significant problem for these countries. For Saudi, the difficulty here is that its membership of GCC, OECD and its links with other global trade organisations which are focused on free labour movement must be matched with achievement of their Saudisation aims, creating the challenge of managing multiple regulations in the same way as EU countries.

In the Italian context, evidence from has shown that labour market flexibility has increasingly pushed employment toward short-term contracts, temporary employment, and other non-traditional forms of employment (Barbieri & Scherer, 2009). This in essence has created two classes of workers in Italy, the well-protected workers with traditional employment roles and the largely unregulated and unprotected workers in non-traditional roles. This has obvious effects for workers, given that social safety nets are often connected in Italy to employment status. Thus, the type of dual regulation or lack of regulatory enforcement seen in Italy and the Baltic states does not necessarily improve conditions for workers overall (though it improves firm advantage).

Although labour market flexibility can be used as a poverty reduction approach, it can also promote poverty within certain segments of the population (Amuedo-Dorantes & Serrano-Padial, 2010). Evidence of the relationship between labour market flexibility and poverty comes from a Spanish study focusing on workers engaged on short-term fixed contracts (rather than the more traditional permanent employment structure). This study shows that workers engaged on temporary contracts, or those who have previously been engaged on temporary contracts, have a significantly higher poverty exposure and higher levels of state dependency than those on open-ended (or permanent) employment contracts.

This study suggests that there is a strong need to manage worker wages and other aspects of temporary conditions that could potentially lead to a worsening of conditions for employees engaged in more flexible work. However, European countries are not insensitive to these effects. For example, the introduction of numerical and functional flexibility means a loss of community and increased job insecurity (Dekker, 2010). The Netherlands has taken an approach to regulation that focuses on improved social security programs in order to support worker requirements in the face of increased employment flexibility. This approach also has general public support, as it is seen as both promoting economic growth and maintaining worker security.

In addition to worker-level effects, firm-level effects of labour market flexibility can also be seen in European firms. A Swiss study of 1,400 firms found that skills-related flexibility was most important in the firms, with high education and on-the-job training respectively being the highest determinants of firm growth (Arvanitis, 2005). This study also showed that team compensation strategies had a negative effect on firm growth, indicating that not all flexibility approaches are positive. Use of temporary work was also associated with firm innovation levels. However, the author suggested that this was not due to a quality of labour flexibility per se, but for the use of specialists on a contract or temporary basis to solve targeted innovation problems. For Saudi females with qualifications, this highlights the need for on-going training and development to maximise the benefit they can give to the firm.

### **The Americas**

As noted above, the English-speaking countries of the northern hemisphere, including Canada and the United States, have a highly flexible and relatively highly skilled work force (Kahn, 2012). However, there is evidence that this flexibility does not necessarily spread across the Americas.

A study in Latin America finds that there is a relatively low level of labour market flexibility, driven by strong collective labour bargaining power (Anner, 2008). At the same time, however, this has been weakening, but this weakening has not addressed issues of labour market flexibility. As such, much of South America has simultaneously a relatively inflexible labour market and relatively low worker protections.

However, a study in Canada shows that there is an increasing degree of labour market flexibility as indicated by a gradual fall in entry earnings for both immigrants and non-immigrants (McDonald & Worswick, 2010). However, immigrants have faced increasing earnings falls, which the authors attribute to a decline in the value of foreign experience. This could indicate that wage flexibility is seen in the Canadian market, but that the corresponding geographic flexibility is becoming less important.

Thus not all evidence from the Americas in terms of labour market flexibility is positive. In particular, evidence from the United States suggests that increasing labour market flexibility leads to increasing worker insecurity and precarious work, causing many workers to have long periods of unemployment (or even to remain unemployed entirely). This has negative effects not only on the worker's personal finances, but also on their sense of personhood given the connection between work and construction of self. The economic effects are also notable, as workers may have extended periods of reduced productivity as they accustom themselves to new forms of work multiple times (Kalleberg, 2009). This strongly suggests that labour market flexibility does not necessarily improve conditions for individual workers. There is however, also evidence that when labour markets are not flexible in the United States, there can be negative consequences. Crawford's (2008) discussion of the National Resident Matching Programme, a medical training programme in which trainee doctors are assigned to advanced positions, has shown that using an inflexible wage system reduces efficient allocation of residents to positions.

## **Africa**

There have been a limited number of studies done in Africa on labour market flexibility, which are important because they compare types of developing economies. A study of Sub-Saharan Africa during the 1990s found that there was significant downward wage elasticity, indicating a degree of labour market flexibility (Kingdon, Sandefur, & Teal, 2006). However, the study also found that there was a major division between those employed by large firms and those employed by smaller firms or in the informal sector, indicating that there may be multiple tiers at which labour market flexibility needs to be assessed.

A study in South Africa found that wage subsidies (used to encourage labour market flexibility) could only be of so much help in increasing labour market flexibility, especially given a relatively low-skilled population (Go et al., 2010). This once more points to the need for skill flexibility (or functional flexibility) to be part of the effort to improve labour market flexibility.

As in most developing economies and regions, the labour market in most North African and Middle Eastern countries are dominated by the informal sector. In addition to this, Pissarides (1993) observed that the labour markets in “most of the countries in this region are characterized by fast population growth, low female labor-force participation rates, a large but declining agricultural and public sector” (p. 1). Although the countries involved in Christopher’s study (Egypt, Morocco, Algeria and Jordan) are relatively less economically endowed compared to Saudi Arabia, with respect to the core concern of this thesis – female labour market access - they share similar characteristics with Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, there is limited evidence of any significant increases in flexible employment practices in the forms and manner which has been evident in Western economies since the 1980s (ibid).

## **Asia and Australia**

A study in Australia suggests that there are differences in the relationship between the regulatory regime and the temporary staffing movement as compared to other countries such as the UK (Coe, Johns, & Ward, 2009). This study particularly suggests that the Australian regulatory regime is transforming itself in order to deal with the increase in temporary staffing, as compared to the regulatory regime in countries such as Italy, where workforce divisions have been formed by the failure of regulations to keep up (Barbieri & Scherer, 2009). However, this is not seen throughout Asia. For example, the Indian regulatory regime is so complex and there are so many laws governing employment that it can be difficult to tell if regulations are changing in time with the change in employment structures (Sharma, 2006). Although this is a matter of some debate, there are no firm answers to be found in the effects of regulation on labour market flexibility in India. In other areas of Asia, such as Malaysia and Sri Lanka, there is an inherent conflict in management styles, with firm managers demanding labour market flexibility but simultaneously using high-performance work systems in order to enhance worker commitment (Caspersz, 2006). This has the net effect of negatively affecting both employee commitment and workforce flexibility.

A study of China shows remarkably different effects. China represents a large, centrally controlled internal labour market, almost entirely provided from within its own citizenry (in contrast to Saudi Arabia) (Zhao, 2005). Various controls within the Chinese labour market include household regulation, migration controls, and controls on training. However, despite these controls there has been substantial urban migration over the past several years, resulting in increasing labour market flexibility. Some ways that flexibility is improved in China include return to education and on-the-job training, both of which increase wages in urban populations (Cooke, 2005; Ng and Warner, 1998; Gamble, 2003).



The case of China suggests that simply excluding migrants is not enough to encourage labour market flexibility due to internal labour market tensions. Another study in East Asia shows that there needs to be distinction made between *de jure* and *de facto* labour flexibility (Caraway, 2010). This study showed that although regulations across East Asia would reflect a relatively inflexible labour market, in fact these regulations were widely flouted, resulting in significantly higher labour market flexibility than would be predicted using standard models. As such, there needs to be consideration of how much flexibility would be expected in practice from employers circumventing rules.

Having provided an overview of the global situation in relation to how flexibility can support the development of the external and internal labour market, it is worth returning to an additional review of the Saudi market which was covered briefly in the Background Chapter, but not from the perspective of flexibility. Moreover, having considered literature in the fields of the labour market, HRM and flexibility there are additional perspectives that have arisen which have salience for this study.

Despite the many criticism about the nature of flexibility and doubts about its claims of improving performance and enhancing work life balance, the evidence cited in the preceding and the current chapters indicates increase appetite for flexibility and the use of flexible employment practices. Whilst the macroeconomic policy can account for the enabling environment for the emergence and development of HRM, it could be argued that theoretical frameworks of HRM, such as Guest's four policy goals theory and the related development in the theorization of flexible firm theory (Atkinson, 1984), have also contributed to the appeal and proliferation of flexibility and flexible employment practices. These issues are pursued in the following section on HRM and flexibility, using Atkinson's (1984) flexible firm theory, which informs many original works on flexibility as an HRM goal (Guest, 1987).

#### **4.2.3 Labour Flexibility and the flexible firm theory**

The flexible firm theory argues that adaptable firms show capability in varying the amount and manner in which they deploy labour (Atkinson, 1984). The theory argues that competitive firms will vary their deployment of labour in terms of numerical, functional and temporary flexibility. These concepts refer to the varying of the number of workers in relation to demand, identifying and differentiating between core and peripheral labour and, accessing and using temporal labour according to fluctuations in demand for goods and services (ibid). In that regard, firms are advised to structure their labour force in categories according to the importance of workers in relation to the firm's core functions.

According to Hinrichs and Jessoula (2012) and Nolan and Slater (2009) this view of the benefits of a flexible labour market are based in the belief that the changing business environment in terms of globalisation, and the resultant increase in the intensity and levels of competition for product markets, and rapid technological and social changes, require organisational adaptability. This argument is reinforced by a public policy environment that perceives the 'rigidity' of labour market institutions, specifically trade unions, as influencing wage setting and the demand and supply of labour that undermines economic competitiveness and exacerbate social unrest.

In these terms, as McQuaid *et al.* (2013) note, flexibility in labour markets provides for wider movement and access to the labour market for a wider range of the population, which underlines the potential benefits of adopting this approach for Saudi female graduates, which are in line with the views of Nolan and Slater (2009) that with renewed efforts by employers to achieve greater 'flexibility' in the rhythms, places patterns of work, labour markets are set to become more dynamic, fluid and heterogeneous. They note that "visionaries anticipate a proliferation of portfolio workers, fixed term contracts, and a higher incidence of part-time working ..." (p. 58).

Labour market flexibility, therefore, refers not only to labour cost flexibility, but also to flexibility in labour mobility, working time and work organization, adaptability, and less strict employment protection legislation (Winer & Shibata, 2002, p208). What this all means, according to Herriot (2001, p68) is that flexibility is a conscious strategy aimed at using human resources to the full so that they can add value. In practice this theoretical aim means devising efficient ways of employing and using labour that reduce the cost of labour and increase productivity, even if that requires geographical differentiations in organisational level practices including employment relations (Rubery and Grimshaw, 2003).

Although this is elaborated on later, it is perhaps necessary to state that since HRM is essentially about the efficient utilisation of labour, flexibility is considered a core HRM policy goal (Guest, 1987). Guest's view of flexibility in the context of HRM, however, is not limited to the flexible utilisation of labour. Guest's idea of flexibility is identified at three levels of organisational strategy and function: Flexible organisational design in terms of structure that enable quick response changes in competitive environment; flexible job design to support multi-tasking and; Labour flexibility, which concerns the flexible deployment of labour (Guest, 1987: 514). However, perhaps the most unambiguous assertion of the significance of flexibility as an HRM goal is the suggested positive correlation it has with commitment, which is at the centre of every of HRM (Beer et al., 1984; Storey, 1995, 2006; Guest, 1987). The suggestion that "the whole rationale for introducing HRM policies is to increase the levels of commitment so that other positive outcomes can ensue" (Guest, 1998, p. 42) and adaptable workers are also more committed, then, specious as that argument may be to some (see Ward et al., 2001; Reed, 2010), it leaves very little doubt as to central position of the concept of flexibility to the analysis of HRM.

However, the strategies and functions that represent the practical application of the idea of flexibility and especially labour flexible have had a much more direct theoretical expression in Atkinson's flexible firm theory (1984). Whilst there remain debates about the ethics (Legge, 2005; Procter and Ackroyd, 2009) and economic efficiency of flexible use of labour (Ward et al. 2001; Reed, 2010), the increased use of flexible employment practice in developed market economies suggest that it is growing in popularity with employers and is in demand from the workforce.

As a result of the increased usage of flexibility within the labour market there are moreover, a number of different dimensions where the flexibility can be exhibited. As defined by Atkinson (1984), these dimensions include temporal flexibility, functional flexibility, numerical flexibility and wage flexibility, as well as skills and contractual flexibility and further definitions of each type are provided below.

- a) *Temporal flexibility*, also known as working time flexibility, allows the organisation to vary the patterns of working time to respond to fluctuations in demand and, sometimes, needs of employee (Procter and Ackroyd, 2006, P. 9; Legge, 2005).
- b) *Functional flexibility* pertains to the ability of the firm to deploy employees between activities and tasks to match changing workloads, production methods or technology (Legge, 2005, p178; Torrington et al., 2008).
- c) *Numerical flexibility* refers to the capacity of a firm to adjust labour inputs to fluctuations in output (Legge, 2005, p178).
- d) *Wage flexibility* pertains to the ability of the firm to adjust employment costs to reflect the state of supply and demand in the external labour market (Legge, 2005, p178).

In addition to these four identified by Atkinson, there are also other types of flexibility being evidenced in the market place. These include:

e) *Contractual flexibility* involves whether a worker is on a full-time or temporary contract; a full-time and permanent employee may be less flexible, from the employer's standpoint, than a worker on a temporary contract. However, the need to continually train temporary workers can reduce the efficiency of those workers; the need for additional training and personnel development with temporary workers can therefore be a limiting factor in flexible contracts.

f) *Skills flexibility* pertains to the job skills of an individual worker, or of a group of workers. Certain skills on the job may be highly specific to a particular contract or job site; in this situation, the skills flexibility of the worker would be relatively low. As skills become more specialised, their flexibility or transferability may decrease.

The type of flexibility offered by employers and sought by employees will be dependent on the organisation and contextual situation in which the flexibility is a) offered b) desired and this is dependent on the cultural, organisational and regulatory framework in which the labour market exists. This wide range of options to enable a firm to be flexible and offer wider access to those in the labour market is however grounded in the overall form and context of flexible employment, which may vary from organisation to organisation and even from country to country, making a review of these areas pertinent to the Saudi context.

#### **4.2.4 Forms and contexts for flexible employment**

In conjunction with the types of flexibility indicated above there are also the dimensions of flexibility in terms of employee skills, employee behaviours and Human Resource practices. However, it is important to mention first that flexibility may be measured in different ways, namely:

- (i) The ease with which employers can employ and terminate their workers;
- (ii) The rules pertaining to the determination of wage and working hours; and
- (iii) The types of work (Booz & Co., 2010).

In Saudi Arabia, flexible work arrangements (i.e. contractual flexibility) are however generally overlooked by laws and regulations that tend to concentrate more on full-time arrangements and therefore deem flexibility as impractical, although this view is being reconsidered (Bacardi et al., 2011 in Vanovermeire et al., 2013). With regard to the other dimensions, (employee skills and behaviour and human resources practices) each of these have some specific elements that would need consideration when evaluating the viability of an overall flexible labour market.

The generation of employee skills flexibility is achieved through two main means: first, companies could have employees who possess a set of broad-based skills and are capable enough to use them when necessary (Bhattacharya & Gibson, 2005). Alternatively, companies may employ a broad variety of specialist employees who provide flexibility because they allow the company to “reconfigure skill profiles to meet changing needs” (ibid p.4).

Employee behaviour flexibility however refers to the capacity of individuals to adapt to changing scenarios or to display the appropriate behavioural patterns under different situations.

Behavioural flexibility is distinct from employee skills flexibility in the sense that an employee may be skilled but does not possess the behavioural motivation to change. Alternatively, some individuals may have high levels of motivations to change but do not have the requisite skills. In light of these, to increase behavioural flexibility in an organization, a company must intentionally recruit workers who display higher levels of adaptability. This is potentially one of the difficulties for Saudi female graduates, who may also be home-makers and mothers and thus their ability to adapt to changed situations may be constricted by external factors meaning they cannot demonstrate behavioural flexibility even if they have the flexible level of skills required by an organisation (Bhattacharya & Gibson, 2005).

The final dimension in this context is that of Human Resources (HR) flexibility, which generates value in several ways. First, the firm is more able to adapt its HR practices to evolving situations. Second, flexibility of HR practices may generate flexible employee behaviours. Third, flexible HR practices enable the firm to offer similar HR practices across different units thereby attaining strategic consistency. This type of flexibility can be vital in an MNC context, and given the high number of MNCs operating in Saudi Arabia in the private sector, suggests that there is room within this framework for increasing the employment potential for female graduates within the country. However, although Royle and Towers (2004) argue that the fast food industry is one of the most globalised sectors, suggesting a convergence here, some, like Marginson and Sisson (2006), suggest a more complex perspective which is more indicative of a pattern of divergence and consistent with Child's (2005) theory of informal organisations within formal organisations. Referring to debates about EU integration with regard to employment relations, Marginson and Sisson suggest more complex, "bottom-up as well as top-bottom, cross-national (horizontal) influences mixed with national (vertical) ones" (p. 25), indicating convergence at some levels and divergence at others.

These different types of flexibility do however need to be considered within the field of HRM and its theoretical and practical applications so that the approach to them is grounded in a clear structure and framework. As such, the following section considers flexibility as a construct within the context of HRM theory whilst also recognising the previously identified background to the development of current HRM thinking already highlighted.

#### **4.2.5 Advantages & Disadvantages of Flexible Employment**

As a solution for problems including poverty and unemployment, there are certain advantages to the use of a labour market flexibility strategy. An econometric analysis of comparative advantage between several nations showed that there was a significant positive effect to various aspects of labour market productivity, including flexible labour markets with high skills and the capacity to build complex productivity structures (Chor, 2010). A significant part of building flexibility is ensuring labour market flexibility (particularly skill flexibility). This study showed that labour market flexibility was particularly advantageous for building export capacity in industries with high global sales volatility. The cause of this increase in efficiency is due to being able to change labour structures and reassign labour rapidly. Thus, there are significant advantages to being able to expand the flexibility of the Saudi labour market.

Whilst flexibility strategies clearly offer a number of advantages, it should also be recognised that there are potential disadvantages to the approach, for both organisations and individuals. For employers, it can have disadvantages such as: increased cost, problems with scheduling and work coordination, difficulties with supervising employees and changes in organizational culture (Burke & Cooper, 2006). For employees, flexible forms of employment are generally not seen to be secure forms of employment (Legge, 2005; Procter & Ackroyd, 2006, 2009).



Legge (2005) for example, states that there is evidence that functional flexibility tends to involve 'job enlargement' rather than true multi-skilling and/or up skilling. According to Legge "there is evidence that the objective is increased management control over the deployment of labour and consequent labour intensification, with QWL outcomes secondary if not incidental" (2005, p. 204). For these reasons, the question arises as to whether flexible workers can also be committed workers and also, whether and to what extent, flexible forms of employment will conflict with the management desire to secure the commitment of workers.

Those who view HRM in strategic terms (Guest, 1987, 1989; Storey, 2001; Boxall and Purcell 2003, 2011; Blyton et al., 2001) as the basis for competitive advantage have argued for flexibility in HR systems, processes and practices to enable organisations to adapt to complex and changing business environment (CIPD, 2013). These strategies, processes and practices have, in some instances, led to conceptualisation and rhetoric, if not realities of internal organisational level HRM policies and practices that are intended and directed at achieving such competitive outcomes.

As a result of these recognitions, flexibility in the recruitment process entails the offering of new formats of employment such as split-shifts, flexi-schedules and telecommuting. Split shifts allow workers who have young children to go home for extended lunch breaks then come back to work and leave later than the rest of co-workers to make up for the difference in working hours. The value of this approach in the Saudi female context will be considered as part of the study, to evaluate whether there is an impact from age in relation to acceptance of, and desire for flexible working. Flexi-schedules refer to earlier or later time-in for employees and telecommuting allows employees to work from home using technology such as computers and the Internet (McDonald, 2012). Regardless of what recruitment decision a manager or company opts for, the main objective is to maximize the productivity of an employee.

Given these potential examples of flexibility, and understanding the nature of Saudi culture, it presents an opportunity for female graduates within the labour market to combine their traditional roles as wife and home-maker with working and contributing to the economic well-being of the country. However, as briefly indicated above, there are both advantages and disadvantages to flexible employment and these are now reviewed in more detail.

While labour market flexibility has economic advantages, there are also potential disadvantages. One issue is that temporary or short-term contract work is associated with increased poverty (Amuedo-Dorantes & Serrano-Padial, 2010). Another disadvantage is that a country's workforce can actually become too educated. The problem of over-education particularly occurs in small, specialized workforces where there are surrounding countries with larger, relatively poorly educated workforces. Under these conditions basic manufacturing and other low-skill occupations may be moved into less expensive surrounding countries. This effect can be reduced in cases where employers are restricted to smaller markets, but given this is not the case in international markets (Büchel & van Ham, 2003) it is something that the Saudi Arabian state decision-makers should be aware of. Given that the aim of the development of the country and the overall Saudisation process is to elevate the standard of living and working for Saudi nationals overall it is important to recognise these potential disadvantages and ensure that any introduction of flexible working is cognisant of these potential difficulties.

There are also other ways in which both firm and worker may be disadvantaged by flexible labour markets. For example, internal labour flexibility within the firm (such as cross-training) is commonly encapsulated in internal knowledge repositories. Excessive reliance on external labour flexibility, however, disrupts these internal knowledge repositories, leaving firms reliant on external labour and ultimately losing core competencies based in

firm knowledge resources (Caroli, 2007). For Saudi Arabia, the high reliance on foreign labour, particularly in multi-nationals means that there is a need to ensure that the Saudisation programme does not result in a major loss of technical expertise and knowledge.

With the investment in training and development that is on-going however (UNDP, 2003) there is evidence that the State is aware of this disadvantage and is taking steps to minimise the potential negative effects. However, this disadvantage also suggests that even in conditions of external labour market flexibility firms may not prefer to take advantage of this flexibility in order to balance knowledge retention (Arvanitis, 2005; Caroli, 2007).

It is clear that a completely open market does not benefit employees, given that it allows for exploitation and will lead to poor working conditions and insecurity (Reilly, 2001). However, determining the degree of protection and regulation required is a difficult task, given the balance between worker rights and growth. For example, a study using EU and USA data suggests that firing costs (such as redundancy payments) have different effects on whether a firm is exiting or continuing. Firing costs associated with exiting firms function as an exit tax, decreasing growth by 0.1%. In contrast, charging firing costs to continuing firms (such as those undergoing workforce reductions) increases growth by a similar amount (Poschke, 2009). This clearly indicates that a growth-stimulating labour market regulatory regime will charge hiring costs only to continuing firms.

Further evidence shows that reducing firing costs, such as taxes and penalties for illegal firing of workers, will increase the use of flexible labour contracts, including those that provide only temporary employment. In Saudi, given the difficult regulations which exist in relation to getting rid of an underperforming Saudi national there is a potential that this

approach to flexibility may be preferable to offering full time contracts and is also in line with the idea of temporary contracts as screening tools (Faccini, 2013). While this does support economic growth, it also has associated effects of increasing employee turnover, increasing job instability (Matouschek, *et al.*, 2009). Ultimately, it is uncertain whether decreases in firing costs actually protect the interests of employers *or* firms, as this reduction may cause the firm to react inappropriately to an exogenous shock about which it does not have sufficient information to make a long-term decision (Matouschek, Ramezzana, & Robert-Nicoud, 2009). Thus, there are strong reasons for even flexible labour market regimes to retain some firing costs, as these continue to promote growth (although they reduce overall labour mobility).

Despite the many disadvantages of the various forms of flexible employment outlined in the preceding section, as well as the broader labour market arguments, the case for flexible employment is also given theoretical support and ‘credibility’ (dubious as that may be) in contemporary people management orthodoxy in the form of Human Resource Management.

The next section looks at HRM in a broad context, in terms of definition and frameworks and the issues that surround this. It also considers the role of flexibility and working practices.

The section discusses the context and origins of HRM, the major models of HRM and, especially focuses on the applicability of these models to the international context. In that respect, the review will focus on concepts and debates about International HRM. Following especially Budhwar and Debrah (2001, 2004) and Mellahi and Wood (2000), the section will review and discuss the literature on the major models of HRM (Tichy et al., 1982; Beer et al., 1984; Hendry and Pettigrew, 1990; Schuler, 1992; and Brewster, 1995) and their general universal applicability and, particularly their applicability to Saudi Arabia. In the latter respect, the analysis will focus on “cultural” and “institutional” factors that can facilitate and/ or mitigate against the dual objectives of the potential for introduction of flexible employment practices and securing employee commitment in the very peculiar social and economic context of Saudi Arabia.

##### **4.3.1 Defining HRM: Context and Definitional Problems**

Until the mid-1980s, Personnel Management remained the basic administrative title for the management of work-related relationships between employees and managers. Industrial relations (IR) focused principally on the national institutional relationship between workers and employers’ organisations with government providing arbitration and meditative roles. Hendry (1991) has argued that contemporary convergence in patterns of IR is influenced by, among other things, “underlying economic and technological trends” that are “mediated also by international institutions” (p. 415). As a construct, distinct from traditional Personnel Management, HRM emerged from the United States in the 1980s (Guest, 1987) as corporate America’s reaction to “the Japanese “Janus” and model of excellence” (Legge, 1995: 79).

Within the American context, the seminal work on HRM is Beer et al.'s (1984) work about the management of Human Assets, which advanced the Harvard Stakeholder Model of HRM. Although they identified trade unions as key, external stakeholders, Beer et al. (1984), their analysis of the HRM system underscore the unitarist nature of HRM, with the suggestion that although "choices about employee Influence ... are inevitable", the extent to which employee exert any influence should be a managerial decision (p. 8). HRM, then, as stated earlier, is essentially about the efficient utilisation of labour and, therefore, concerns "management decisions and behaviours used, consciously or unconsciously, to control, influence, and motivate those who provide work for the organization – the human resources" (Storey, 2001, p. 64).

Since its emergence in the early 1980s, the academic form of HRM (Storey, 2007) has been concerned by the fussiness of its definition and efforts to distinguish it from the traditional personnel management theory of managing people in an employment context (Guest, 1989; Legge, 1995; Keenoy, 1999; Purcell, 1995). These debates have led to the development of some major models of HRM including: the *Matching model* (Tichy et al., 1982); the *Harvard stakeholder model* (Beer et al., 1984); the *Contextual model* (Hendry and Pettigrew, 1990); the *5-P Model* (Schuler, 1992); and the *European Model* (Brewster, 1995). Although these models put emphasis on different elements of HRM, the core assumptions and goals at the heart of Beer et al. (1984), Guest (1987), and Storey's (1995) models remain. Among others, these theories emphasise assumptions and goals of *flexibility* and *commitment* as key to successful management of human resources.

HRM, however, also emerged in the context of fierce economic and business competition that was taking place on unprecedented global scale. As a result of global integration of business in general, but also production particularly, the academic concerns and analysis of HRM also focused on the practical application of various theories of HRM in various global contexts.

In that respect, analysis of HRM, has evolved into the forms of International, Comparative and, or Strategic International HRM (Harzing and Pennington, 2011; Edwards and Rees, 2011; Budhwar and Debrah, 2001; and Schuler et al., 1993), have sought to analyse and explore the applicability of different models of HRM outlined above in an international context.

Much has happened to HRM, at least in its form of existence as “academic discourse” (Storey, 2007, p. 1) since the idea emerged in the 1980s. However, the goals of “flexibility” and “commitment” remain central to the contemporary core agenda and debate about HRM, which is the concern “to conceptualise and test the links between HRM and business strategy and performance” (Legge, 2005, p. 4).

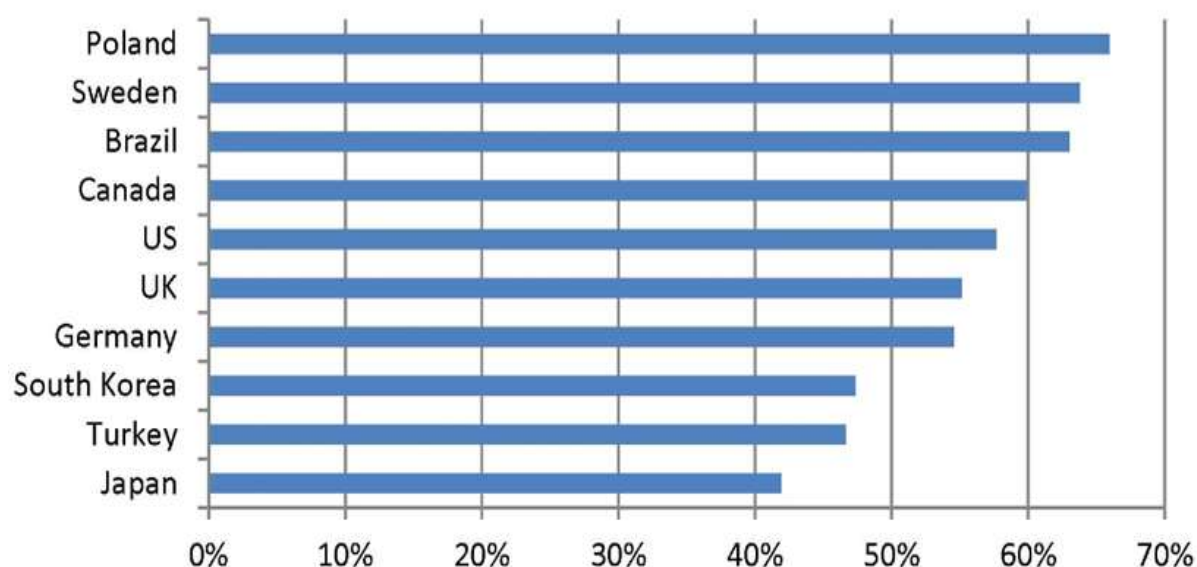
Guest (1987) further states that “things are happening in employment that are neither a cause nor an effect of HRM but which could have some impact on it. This includes the intensification of work the choices of work location provided by technology and the divisive nature of society in which many are idle and impoverished while many others are seriously over-worked” (Guest, 1998: 51). the assumption from this is that the internal labour market strategies, policies and practices of organisation are dictated by factors and circumstances that are uncertain and largely beyond the ability of any organisation to anticipate much less fashion full proof strategies against their adverse consequences. In other words, it is all about “managing in uncharted waters” (Storey, 2001 iv).

Nevertheless, the second part of the discussion shifts on internal employee resourcing strategies of firms, but particularly focusing on the recruitment and selection and employee development strategies and function, which are covered in Section 4.3.3. The rationale for that focus in relation to this study is based on the assumptions that as firms focus more on their internal labour management for competitive advantage and knowledge retention (Benson *et al*, 2011; Nolan and Slater, 2009), labour market participation problems of

women graduates can be attributed to absence from the internal labour market putting them at a significant disadvantage. The proverbial ‘glass ceiling’ can be attributed to the historical underrepresentation of women in the labour market in general, and particularly in the internal labour market. Although the ‘ceiling’ is sometimes attributed to an invisible barrier erected by a patriarchal social order which limits women’s access to economic activity (Davies-Netzley, 1998), another more visible explanation is the historical exclusion of women from opportunities for developing their human capital in most parts of world.

However, recent data indicates that the trend for male overrepresentation in higher education has been in reversal in the past 10 years (Vincent-Lancrin, 2014). Figure 4.5 shows a shift in most OECD countries and the report indicates that although men still outnumber women in emerging and developing economies, there are indications that even in these contexts, women are catching up.

FIGURE 4.5: FEMALES PURSUING HIGHER EDUCATION: PERCENTAGES IN SELECTED OECD NATIONS, 2011



Source: Vincent-Lancrin, 2014



The Report found that women will outnumber men by about one third in UK university enrolment in 2014 and that in 2013, almost 53% of university graduates in the United States were women, including about 60% of master's degrees and 52% of doctoral degree awardees. Based on this data, OECD predicts that only Japan, Korea, Switzerland, and Turkey will fail to have equal numbers of men and women in higher education by 2015. In emerging and developing economies, the trend is largely the same. Although there are slightly fewer women in higher education in China and India (48 and 42 % respectively), these figures represent an increase on the 2005 data for these countries and, according to the OECD, data from many Middle Eastern states, including Saudi Arabia, indicate that more women are in university than men (Vincent-Lancrin, 2014).

According to Al-Arabiya (2012), the Booz and Co Report contradicts the claims that more women are enrolled in university than men. Although the paper reports that there has been a significant increase in women's university enrolment since 1992 (5.4% to 14.4%), it also quoted Al-Sharq (a local Saudi newspaper) as saying that "the number remains the lowest in the Gulf region". However, Al-Mubarak (2011) presents data from the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education and the Saudi Monetary Agency which indicates that as at 2004/5, almost 40% of university enrolments for Master's and PhD courses were women and 60% of PhD awards in 2004 were to women.

These data, in conjunction with the OECD data, suggest that if under-representation in higher education is the cause of the "glass ceiling", then there is reason to believe that the increase in women's representation in higher education should be reflected in significant increase in the strength of their labour market position. However, both the Booz and Co. report and the Washington Post (cited earlier), suggest to the contrary.

Citing the Booz and Co. Report, Al-Arabiya (2012) report that: “Women in Saudi Arabia make up 57 percent of their country’s university graduates but just 17 percent of Saudi female nationals go on to find employment... Perhaps most strikingly, 78.3 percent of unemployed women in Saudi Arabia are university graduates”.

The report goes on to state that although women outperform men in PhD awards, more than one thousand women PhD holders in Saudi Arabia find themselves in long-term unemployment.

Recruitment strategies currently employed in the Saudi labour market appear to disadvantage women graduates, although as Abu-Nasr (2013) highlights, there are moves to deal with this through specialist recruitment agencies, which can take account of the cultural values, and social change to meet individual female workers’ needs and encourage their entry into the labour market. In addition, as RT News (2014) notes, a female only law firm has now opened to protect female workers’ rights and provide advice, further underlining the changes that are taking place within the country in relation to female participation in the labour market.

To some extent, the underlying assumption of this study – i.e. the potential of flexible employment as a solution for the employment problems of Saudi female graduates - is informed by the theory of flexibility as an HRM goal (Guest, 1987). The initial argument, which, as discussed earlier, was informed by Atkinson’s (1984) flexible firm theory, led to subsequent theoretical assertions of flexibility as strategic use of labour in the context of debates about HRM as a strategic function (Storey, 2001, 2006). Subsequently, advocates argued for flexibility in operational terms, as work/life balance and family friendly strategy (Armstrong, 2010). These debates, it goes without saying, are relevant and the aim of the following subsection, therefore, is to review relevant literature as the basis for assessing the credibility of flexibility as a solution.

#### **4.3.2 Notion of flexibility as HRM goal**

Flexibility of employment strategy and in employment practice has become central to the HRM debate on the grounds of flexible use of labour as one of the core HRM goals (Guest, 1987; Koene *et al.*, 2014). In that context, three forms of flexibility are identified: organisational flexibility, flexibility in job design and labour flexibility (Kelliher and Anderson, 2010), as indicated by Atkinson (1984) and his notion of the flexible firm which is covered in more detail later in this chapter.

In practice, when applied to the management of Human resources flexibility finds practical application in patterns in the use of labour, pay, working time and work organization (Corby & White, 2002, p17). The arguments for flexibility, however they are defined, also rest on the broader argument about the superiority of “market determinism” (Elam, 1990 in Procter and Ackroyd, 2006), linking into economic theories of the labour market and identifying that demand and supply do not operate in isolation but are impacted on by other factors such as the individual requirements of a firm or worker. What this means as Kelliher and Anderson (2010) note is that in today’s intensive competitive environment, organisations seek and use different forms of flexibility as the means to improve productivity and achieve the market position essential for profitability. In the Saudi context moreover, this approach also offers a means to balance the need to increase indigenous participation in the workforce, particularly that of young educated females, to benefit from the increases in education that have been provided but also to reduce the country’s reliance on foreign labour and immigration.

The ideas of labour market flexibility and flexible employment, have gained greater currency against the background of the changes in the labour market indicated in the preceding section. These, as already indicated, include neo-liberal economic management principles that centre on decreased public sector and increased roles for private sector and

free market ideas and principles as the basis for economic competitiveness (Burroni and Keune, 2011; Brown et al, 2003; Moore, 2002). Flexibility, then, is consistent with the free market views of labour market flexibility that consider the role of trade unions and government intervention as bad and unnecessary (Legge, 2005; Sala *et al.*, 2012; Cuñat and Meltiz, 2012). At the same time, flexibility recognises, as does the radical institutional theory of the labour market that social, cultural and other factors will impact on the achievement of the labour market equilibrium in terms of supply of demand.

“At its broadest, flexibility is perhaps best understood as the quality by which an entity adapts itself to a change in the demands made upon it” (Procter & Ackroyd, 2006 p .473). For the UK Government, the attraction of flexibility within employment markets has been based on the belief that “a flexible labour market is one that has the ability to adjust to changing economic conditions in a way that keeps employment high, unemployment and inflation low; and ensures continuing growth in real income” (H. M. Treasury 2003, p. 10).

This suggests therefore, given the issues identified within the Saudi Arabian context, that a flexible labour market has a potential to resolve some of the issues of unemployment and also to offer wider opportunities to female graduates to ensure that their skills remain within the Saudi labour market and are not taken to other countries, leaving a skills gap in the national knowledge. Furthermore, it means that there is a currently a high level of well-educated but unemployed females in the country, unable to contribute to the growth of their nation. In order to investigate this further, notions of flexibility within a firm and in the external labour market are now considered.

## **Flexibility in the context of HRM theory**

At the broader national and labour market level, the arguments about flexible employment can be seen as being shaped by neo-liberal policies that viewed inflexible labour market institutions and employment practices as constraints on economic competitiveness (Wolff and Resnick, 2012; Brown and Nolan, 1988). As the earlier discussion on labour market theories identified however, current thinking recognises that it is not simply a question of labour supply and demand and that there are a number of other variables that create and manifest with the context of labour markets, including, as already highlighted, cultural and social values and changing requirements in relation to work life balance. In the broader context of neo-liberal economic theory, however, perhaps Hayek's (1984) concept of reciprocity as opposed to the 'common purpose' argument resonates most. According to Hayek, the orderly working of the market depends more on "reciprocity, that is reconciliation of different purposes for the mutual benefit of the participant" (pp. 365-6).

This led to the concept of 'tight-loose' organisational structures which was advocated by management gurus like Peters and Waterman (1982) and Drucker (1998). In essence, firms adopting this level of understanding about the variables of the labour market recognise that the notion of flexibility as an organisational goal lies at the core of the concept of HRM (Guest, 1987; Kelliher and Anderson, 2010) and draws on the seminal work of Atkinson on the flexible firm model (1984). To underline the value of this approach and why it may be viable for the Saudi labour market, this section thus explores the concepts of flexibility in the context HRM as a distinct approach to managing people that uses flexibility in its various forms as strategy for delivering competitive advantage.

Although earlier models of HRM (Beer et al., 1984) alluded to the idea of adaptability as core to successful management of human resources, it was Guest (1987) who identified 'flexibility' as an essential and necessary HRM goal. Guest identifies three components of flexibility in the context of HRM.

The essence of Guest's analysis is that in order for organisations to succeed in the current highly competitive business environment, it must, as, to quote Legge (2005, p. 175) "have the capacity to manage planned change and to be adaptive to uncertainties and unanticipated pressures at all levels in the organisation". That, according to Guest's model, would require "seeking flexibility through organic structures, extensive decentralisation and delegation of control and, therefore through the design of jobs" to achieve functional flexibility – "polyvalency and multi-skilling" (Atkinson, 1984). Since Guest developed his model, flexibility and multi-skilling and the need to adapt to changes within internal and external labour markets has evolved to recognise that for a firm wishing to maximise its resources, encourage loyalty and commitment and move forward in a competitive environment flexibility is a key strategy to adopt (De Menezes and Kelliher, 2011; Eversole *et al.*, 2012).

The idea of flexibility as competitive strategy is an old idea that is not necessarily limited to analysis of HRM. Penrose (1959) makes the argument that in a vibrant business environment, organisational performance will depend on the firms' flexibilities in terms of access and use of resources in response to alternative competitive approaches. In some ways, this is also implicit (if not explicit) in theories of internationalisation, including Hymer's *firm specific advantage* theory and Dunning's *eclectic paradigm* (Hymer, 1976; Dunning, 1993 both in Edwards and Rees, 2011). These theories infer the need for flexibility for organisations to be more effectively and efficiently internalise and exploit their specific ownership advantage in terms of brand, technology or practice, in markets that are locationally advantageous. Perhaps the most important contextual factors that underpin firms' capacity to use flexibility as competitive strategy in international context are technology and cheap labour.

Wright and Snell (1998: 132) see HR flexibility as having three clear differences. These are: flexibilities of skill, behaviour and HR practices, all of which share features with the functional flexibility in Atkinson's framework. Skill flexibility refers to two attributes: the number of potential alternative uses to which employee skills can be applied (resource flexibility) and how individuals with different skills can be quickly redeployed (coordination flexibility). Behavioural flexibility indicates the presence of an adequate range of behavioural attributes among employees, which they can adapt to the needs of situations (resource flexibility), comparable to Atkinson's temporal flexibility but at the same time, ensure that they are able to ensure similar responses from different members to identical situations (coordination flexibility). Flexibility of HR practices represents the extent to which they can be adapted and applied across a variety of situations and thus is a reflection of the wage and numerical flexibility dimensions of Atkinson's framework.

In many ways these two models of HR flexibility are similar, and at the level of the firm, can be played in terms of the various approaches to labour flexibility outlined in Atkinson's (1984) flexible firm model. They both assume what Herriot (2001, p68) calls "a conscious strategy aimed at using human resources to the full so that they can add value". That means devising efficient ways of employing and using labour that reduce cost of labour and increase productivity.

#### **4.3.3 Internal HRM strategies and practices of firms**

Changes in the labour market as a result of globalisation, technological innovation and social factors such as demographic changes in society will be variably felt by different countries and their labour markets, and as a result there are on-going debates about the effects of this context on HRM. However, contextual differences aside, organisations, especially in the advanced market economies, have tended to adopt similar HRM strategies and practices that are underpinned by the neo-liberal ideology about the labour market and

the relationship between individuals and their employer organisation. These strategies tend to focus more on the resource based view of the firm (Barney, 1991) and therefore, how the internal resources of the firm are secured, developed and managed in accordance with the goals of the organisation. Essentially, the argument centres on the strategic approach to recruitment and selection, training and development and management of productivity (Storey, 1995, 2001).

The competitive business environment, should ideally require high levels of mutual commitment that is based on a strong emphasis on employee resourcing (recruitment and selection) practices that aim at attracting highly committed and flexible workers, but, more importantly, that focuses on an internal labour market which rewards commitment and training, with promotion and job security secured with direct communication and involvement of employees whether collectively or individually. This perspective of recruitment and selection fits with Bratton and Gold's (2007) view of recruitment and selection as the vital starting point to the evolving nature of an employment relationship that is, or should be, based on some comprehension of reciprocal expectations of employers and employees.

In the context of this study therefore, this suggests that the investment made by females in Saudi through their studies and focus on education should be rewarded by appropriate access and participation within the labour market. Given this, the strategies adopted for recruitment and selection within the Kingdom should be designed to encourage initial entry through the external market but with a focus on longer term development within internal markets. This is thus an additional area where flexibility can manifest itself in the way that recruitment decisions are made.



## **Recruitment and Selection**

Recruitment is the process through which potential employees are attracted and encouraged to apply for a vacant position in a firm (Sutherland & Wöcke, 2011; Othman, 2009 and Boudreau & Rynes, 1985). Organizational recruitment used to be a reactive process that companies undertook from time to time as job vacancies needed to be filled (Snell & Bohlander, 2012). These days, however, increasing numbers of companies are harnessing recruitment as a strategic imperative and therefore an on-going necessity. It is important to distinguish recruitment from selection, the later which pertains to the process of making fair and relevant assessments regarding the strengths and weaknesses of applications for the purpose of hiring them. One of the strategic recruitment decisions is whether recruitment will be intensive or continuous (Mathis & Jackson, 2011). Continuous efforts at recruitment can provide the advantage of keeping the employer in the recruitment market. On the other hand, intensive recruitment could be in the form of a vigorous recruiting campaign that aims at hiring a pool of employees typically within a short period of time.

The approach taken by an organisation can reflect either the dominant sector approach to recruitment, and/or, an organisation HR philosopher and, therefore, approach to employment relations. In that regard, as discussed elsewhere, organisations that are in highly competitive high skilled and professional markets tend to focus on their internal labour market and, therefore, recruitment becomes much more a continuous strategic function that is aligned with other related HR functions such as career management and retention strategies (Taylor, 2008). Alternatively, low skilled sectors, such as some service sector enterprises like fast food, could be engaged in short recruitment campaigns that focus on external labour markets. Such firms are not entirely concerned about turnover rates, because their operations tend to require generic, low skills that are not challenging to acquire.

However, such organisations also tend to be in perpetual recruitment, because turnover rates tend to be exceptionally high (Torrington et al., 2011). Having said these, high skill end firms can also engage in short-term recruitment campaign during early stages of expansion into new markets.

A basic recruitment decision is whether it will be organization-based or outsourced. Traditionally, HRM staff takes care of the recruitment decisions for a company. However, as tasks for HRM staff rapidly evolve, there have been increasing instances when these staff members hardly have time for the complex process of recruitment and therefore simply outsource this to specialists such as head hunters. Another strategic decision that impacts organizational performance is on whether recruitment will be undertaken to fill staffing needs with regular or full-time employees (Mathis & Jackson, 2011). Decisions as to which should be recruited largely depend on whether to search for regular employees or to use more flexible approaches that could include temporary employees or independent contractors.

There are times when certain employers feel that the cost of maintaining a regular workforce could become too excessive and this scenario is growing worse due to a host of governmental, competitive and economic considerations. However, most of the time, it is not only money that is the main consideration. In many Western countries, the large number of employment regulations also constrains employment relationships making many employers reluctant to hire new regular and full time employees. Some of the main reasons that are attributed to these include tax and income policy as well as employment protection policies. For example, although the fears that were expressed did not come to pass, one of the main arguments against national minimum wage in Britain was that it will cause unemployment because employers will cut on hiring in order to manage the additional labour cost that will generated (Lipsey and Chrystal, 2004).

In international context, MNEs have always used employment protection criterion in their location and relocation decision-making (Klein, 2007). As such, they have used their privileged control over FDI to force nations to compete against each other and, in the process, drive down terms and condition, including employment protection (Edwards and Rees, 2011; Dicken, 2011). In this regard, Edwards and Rees note that: “insofar as MNCs seek to advantages from both their home and host locations, they can be seen as ‘political actors’, using power to shape the conditions under which they conduct their productive activities” (2011, p. 23). Most developing countries have reacted to these pressures by legislating favourable terms for MNCs with very generous tax incentives and repressive employment laws that exclude trade unions from export sectors of the economy (Grimshaw et al., 2011).

Companies may decide between using temporary employees by hiring their own temporary staff contract with agencies supplying temporary workers on a *pro rata* basis (Mathis & Jackson, 2011). Meanwhile, there are also companies that employ independent contractors as workers who perform specific services on a contractual basis. One main reason for using independent contractors is that most of them do not ask for employee benefits. This is another area where globalisation has impacted on labour markets. The make up of the global workforce is rapidly changing and today’s labour markets tend to be highly diverse, with people of different ages coming from different cultures being members of the labour market. As a result, the age gap between members of a particular labour force could translate into as much as forty years. In relation to this, people of different ages have different needs. Older working people tend to have families and seek stability in their work while it is not uncommon for younger ones to leap from one job to another seeking success in their chosen professions. Because of these disparities, organizations have been discovering that one way they could be flexible in terms of recruitment is for them to strive and provide their potential employees with a healthy work/life balance, especially with

regards to older recruits, an area which will be reviewed by the results of this study (Benefits Quarterly, 2008; Carless & Wintle, 2007; McDonald, 2006).

In the context of employee resourcing moreover, Iles (2001) suggests a framework of employee resourcing that argues for three perspectives of employee resourcing in general, but specifically, in the areas of recruitment and selection. According to Iles, approaches and experiences of recruitment and selection can be viewed as serving a *Psychometric objective*, for resourcing knowledge and power and/or social process and experience. The processes are therefore either governed by “political, social and legal pressures” or constructed as “part of the government of organisations and the regulation of individuals, including their subjectivity” or framed and viewed as “ostensibly scientific” that is intended to justify management decision (pp. 154-157).

In essence Iles presents a critical analysis that exposes the inherent problems of the psychometric-objective perspective and instead, makes a compelling argument for “the emerging social process model” (Iles, 2001 p. 57), which is to say that employee resourcing decisions are not neutral and must be considered in the context of the power and of control that is inherent to the employment relationship. Nevertheless, recruitment and selection processes and decisions, in the context of highly competitive environments that require flexible labour markets and flexible use of labour, are increasingly shifting towards strategic practices of recruitment and selection that seek to extend managerial frontiers of control (Goodrich, 1920) into the psychological space of using recruitment and selection techniques that derive from psychology such as psychometric testing and profiling. The use of what Iles (2001) describes as psychometric-objective model of resourcing is justified on the account that they have predictive value as whether potential employees are flexible enough to be socialised to the organisations culture.

One of most common methods of recruitment and selection that reflects the desire of management to control the psychological space of employees is psychometric testing. The rationale for the increasing use of such methods is trying to secure fit and commitment, which is central to all theories of HRM, requires focusing on behavioural competences as the most effective predictors of organisational fit and commitment and, therefore, future performance (ibid). Thus, in spite of the obvious limitations (See Webb, 1991; Gibbon, 1992), Armstrong (2006), for example, proposes tests using self-reporting questionnaires including 'inventory' of traits, intelligence, values, interests, attitudes and preferences that measure emotional stability (neuroticism), extroversion/introversion, openness to experience, degree of agreeableness and conscientiousness. However, the objectivity and even the usefulness of these methods are being questioned. Webb (1991) argues that: "For example, not only does the sex, ethnicity, etc. of the rater matter, but also when the occupation is typically held by men, women applicants are rated less favourably. The more white men among the raters, the lower were black women rated" (pp.19-20)

Others, such as Gibbon (1992) question the efficiency and overall utility of such invasive practices especially in light of the fact that:

"most jobs...could be done equally well by anybody. A majority of those employed use less 'skill' at work than they would driving a car to or from work. ... even where specific identifiable qualities or qualifications are required for a particular job or occupation, the chances of any single individual alone unambiguously embodying these qualities is much less than the chances that none will or that more than one will" (p. 238).

These practices in the Saudi context may also be an additional barrier to female participation in the labour market as the focus on promoting from within using the internal labour market is counterproductive to encouraging greater participation.

Furthermore, returning to the basic Saudi cultural characteristics identified in the background chapter (pp. 32-34), a female interviewee may find the psychological tests invasive and insulting, and would rather be recruited on the basis of her skills and qualifications than psychological make-up, as Anderson *et al.* (2012) highlight.

The strong focus on behavioural competences is a relatively recent phenomenon that seems to reflect the central concern for organisation fit and commitment that is at the core of HRM practices. This focus and concern is, therefore, also reflected in practice of training and development and the benefit that the practice can provide for long term competitiveness. The salience of this for the Saudi female context is that once employed, if an organisation is prepared to develop their existing skills and encourage professional development the knowledge is thus retained within the organisation, contributing to its future success.

### **Training and Development**

At a broader level of debate and analysis, the issues of employee training focus on the national labour market and involvement of employers, governments and employees and their representatives in vocational training (Rubery and Grimshaw, 2003; Grugulis, 2006).

The debates, in that respect, centre on the question of who is responsible for training and how and to what extent the role of the state, in particular, has changed in light of the current social and economic imperatives in which national economies and business exist and operate (Sutherland and Rainbird, 2000; Bosch and Charest, 2008; CEDEFOP, 2010).

From the perspective of evaluating the participation of Saudi female graduates in the country's labour market, what this suggests is that there is also a need for policy intervention within the labour market that recognises and addresses the historical and social disadvantages that have always hindered their labour market participation and career trajectories.

In that regard, although closer links between educational establishments and employers and the need for educational institutions to focus on and teach the right skills to make them desirable as employees (Tlaiss, 2013) are useful, there is really no evidence that lack of these have any significant impact on current labour market situation and status of female graduates in Saudi Arabia. At the same time, by virtue of historical disadvantages, as noted earlier females who do manage to enter the workforce may find themselves unable to access development opportunities and therefore, the HRM training and development functions will need to ensure that there is on-going commitment and support to increasing the skills of female graduates if their knowledge is not to be wasted and can contribute to the overall economy (Al-Mahmoud *et al*, 2012).

Almost all of the related literature seeks to explore the links between approaches to NVET strategy and the extent to which there is a national skills gap (Keep, 1989; Broadberry and O'Mahony, 2004). This debate is generally framed in terms of comparison between three models of NVET systems; the voluntarist, regulatory and developmental systems and how these systems also relate to whether the focus of training is on the internal labour market (voluntarist) or the external labour market (regulatory) (Rubery and Grimshaw, 2003). These arguments manifest themselves in the theoretical debates about the essence and concerns of employee training and development and whether and to what extent organisational training and development agendas should focus on organisational-specific as oppose to general skills and competences that will also enhance employability and greater opportunity for labour market mobility.

The issues in this context are not so much about the contribution that training makes to an organisation. The broad consensus that the purpose of training in an organization is to increase the abilities of the individual and to satisfy the current and future demands of the organization (Dermol and Carter, 2013) has not changed.

In addition, and in relation to the objectives of commitment as defined by the desire to stay in the employment of an organisation, training also constitutes an employee retention tool (Taylor, 2008). However, in that regard, Kirton and Greene (2002 in Torrington et al 2011), have noted that even where organisations willingly provide training opportunities, they cannot rely on that exclusively as a retention strategy. Instead, in order for training to be effective retention tool, it must be complemented by other incentives including, for example; pay, career progression and good employment relations (ibid). However, Keep's (1989) observation that, in practice, the process is complicated by the objectives of the parties involved also remains true. For employers, the purpose of employee training and development is to develop the capacity of existing employees for the sole purpose of improving organisational profitability. As a result, generally, employers tend to be more willing to invest in firm specific rather than general training (Rainbird, 2000; Stewart, 1999; Grugulis, 2006). Finally, there are the employees, who are interested in improving and getting skills through training. This is particularly so in the current highly volatile and competitive labour market environment and vital for Saudi Arabia's long term development and Saudisation programme.

The literature, therefore, has tended to pursue themes and debates about training and development into the territories of individual and collective learning to expose the complexities of measuring the impact of 'learning'. The extent of the link between employee development activity and organisational performance, conceptualised as strategic human resource development (Rainbird, 2000; Keep, 2005 and Keep and Rainbird, 2003) has therefore become the centre piece of the analysis of training provision and decision in organisational context. The question of whether and to what extent training can be considered a strategic imperative and the value in developing all employees is further pursued through the related concepts of organisational learning and the learning organisation theory (Keep and Rainbird, 2000; Rainbird, 1994; Easterby-Smith, 1997).



From the perspective of this work and its focus on female graduates entering the labour market, the issue of training and development is also important due to the fact that without training, females will not be able to progress and thus contribute long term to the economy. The increased learning of females in the Kingdom which has occurred as a result of the changes to education policy already indicated suggest that the State has a commitment to developing female potential but this also needs to be extended into the labour market so that knowledge and ability are not wasted through lack of training investment in female graduates (Baki, 2004; Al-Dosary *et al.*, 2006).

These debates have further led to the alternative of focusing on the development of key individuals, who make up the core labour force and especially those in key decision-making roles, who are believed to provide some form of competitive advantage, which is the basis for the notion of management development (Guest and King, 2005; Doyle, 2007). In that respect, the training and development strategies and practices relate to the core/periphery frame of flexible use of labour. The objective of training therefore, becomes what CIPD (2014b) describes as a systematic process for managers to improve their skills, knowledge and competence in ways that are mutually beneficial to the individual manager and their employer organisation. However, although both the Government and employers emphasise the importance of management development to micro and macroeconomic competitiveness, the evidence of suggests a significant gap between the rhetoric and reality of management development in the UK. A survey of 433 UK organisations found that many consider the current management development programmes to be non-strategic because they are clearly linked to business goals and challenges and only 16% of respondents think their organisations are capable of developing appropriate training needs analysis practices to identify critical management skills and competence gaps.

Despite the claims associated with management development such improved performance, better employment relations and health and wellbeing (Wilton *et al*, 2007; UKCES, 2012; HSE/CIPD/IIP, 2008), a more recent CIPD study (Marchington and Wilkinson, 2012) indicates little, if anything, has changed since 2002, because the Annual Survey Report 2012, found that 72% of organisations in England have lacking in management and leadership skills.

Another perspective on ILM is that it is a response to the specialization of labour input. Because skills tend to be specific to a particular firm in which they are used, there was little incentive then for employees to invest in their own skill development. To obtain the necessary skills, employers had to make these investments themselves and then tie down workers to their jobs so that the investments would be worth it. This approach to training and development is consistent with the voluntarist VETs (Rubery and Grimshaw, 2003). In macroeconomic terms, it is consistent with the neoliberal ideology that is also associated with HRM. In this regard, training and development decisions and policies are management's unilateral prerogative and concerned with organisational priorities (Grugulis, 2006).

As a consequence, skilled, employers also tend to rely on outsourcing and other atypical forms of employment which are consistent with flexibility. As a result, and meanwhile, contingent labour - flexible use of labour forms of, for example, temporary, contractual work, is becoming more popular because it is appealing to the workers themselves and to businesses (Cardon, 2003; Milner & Pinker, 2001 and Swart, 2011). To note, contingent employees work either full-time or part-time, under contract for a defined period of time or on a project basis. The use of contingent labour has reportedly increased by 20% over the last year mainly because this type of arrangement is friendly to companies that have been hit hard by the most recent economic crisis.

Although, traditionally, contingent workers have been used by business to address skill gaps, Williamson (1996 in Ward et al., 2001) observed that they have become part of the array of flexible and atypical employment practices that are used by employers as labour is increasingly viewed as a business bottom-line in its own right as oppose to being one of the factors of production. Consequently although high-skilled businesses have been the traditional employers of contingent workers to address skill gaps, a survey of 400 major American businesses evidence indicate that, increasing number of organisations are permanently using contingent work as a major way of employing labour (see Table 4.1).

TABLE 4.1: USE OF CONTINGENT WORK IN THE UNITED STATES BY SECTOR IN PERCENTAGE

<b>Sector</b>	<b>Contingent work%</b>
Retail	82%
Financial Services	80%
Health care	81%
Professional services	81%
Public service agency	86%

**Source: Accenture, 2013**

Among the advantages of contingent Labour are that workers may tap into the new revenue streams so that they could supplement their income; they can enhance their knowledge, experience and skills and they are able to find flexible work arrangement that meet that requirements of the schedules. The main drawback, of course, of contingent work is that usually, workers are not able to avail themselves of typical benefits that are associated with the regular employee, such as paid vacation, sick days, health insurance and sense of belonging to a group. Crucially, contingent work, as indicated in Overell ‘s report for ACAS (2013), is also associated with job insecurity. Overell critics those who romanticise these types of employment arguing that “security remains an enduring aspiration for workers: a good job is a secure job.

It follows that when security is diminished, so too is wellbeing both for the individuals and the workplace” (ACAS, 2013, p. 2).

The other aspect of recruitment, training and indeed HRM practices, when viewed from the Saudi perspective and specifically the difficulties experienced by female graduates in entering the labour market, is that of achieving increases in their skill set and knowledge and thus societal contribution from the HRM practices used by private sector firms in the Kingdom. In this respect therefore, it is dependent on whether convergent or divergent HRM practices are being utilised. Whilst the role of convergence and divergence has been briefly alluded to earlier in the thesis, it is worth providing a more detailed evaluation of them and their potential for impact on the Saudi labour market, particularly in the context of female graduates and the potential for them to work for MNCs in the Kingdom.

#### **4.3.4 Divergence and Convergence of Labour Systems**

A definition of these two terms in the context of globalisation, and indeed HRM is that convergence refers to the fact that technology acts as catalyst to create value systems between individuals based on consistency with the technology and process irrespective of social-cultural influences. In direct contrast, divergence refers to the situation where socio-cultural factors are the driving force of the value system and thus practices of an organisation, region or country, irrespective of other influences including those of technology, economic or political change (Koldewijn, 2009).

The constructs of divergence and convergence may be illustrated through two questions. Are the world’s cultures remaining distinct from one another and therefore separate (diverging?) or are humans moving along toward a common and shared way of living (converging?). There are people who insist that globalization has made nations convergent while many insist that the world is still highly divergent (Friedman, 2005; Hirst and Thompson, 1992).

The issue at stake in the divergence-convergence debate is whether and how forces of economic globalization “take over domestic forces in the processes of national policy- and institution- making” (Cao, 2006, p. 1). This debate also presents a conceptual challenge to conventional and traditional methods of political economy that largely assume “that the most important political processes to model are internal to each polity” (ibid, p.1).

Cultural theorists have been accumulating empirical evidence for both the convergence and divergence perspectives (Lang and Wald, 2012). Despite this, there is still no clear consensus about which is the dominant paradigm (Paik *et al.* 2011). In terms of cross cultural work that indicates divergence is dominant, the major theorist on culture, Hofstede (1980, 2001), explains that the fundamental cultural differences among countries lie in values (Yaeger, Head & Sorensen, 2006). Typically, systematic differences are discernible in the context of values pertaining to power and inequality with no regard for the relationship between the person and the culture, with regard to the social roles that are expected from males and females, with regard to the manner in which people deal with uncertainties in life and with regard to whether one is preoccupied about the future, the present or the past (Yaeger, Head & Sorensen 2006).

However, it has been noted that the advent of technology as well as other economic factors are pushing for integration but there are even more powerful forces that push towards fragmentation among cultures. Based on these beliefs, there have been persistent doubts as to whether it is truly possible to lead or manage organizations in such a way that cross-cultural boundaries are addressed. According to these observers, it is very possible for organizations to be working along highly similar working dimensions such as physical plants (Edwards, Rees and Zhang, 2011; Horwitz et al., 2002; Edwards et al., 1999), product, layout or even information systems. In reality these elements could be totally different depending on how human cultures interpret them.

Some of the factors that are cited as agents of convergence of practice include dominant economy theory, which argues that the fact that practices associated with the success of dominant economic powers will be imitated (Horwitz et al 2002; Brewster et al. 2011). Other factors include increasing integration production systems, networks and cross-border mergers and acquisition (Edwards et al, 1999) and, the role of Western (British and American) Business Schools, which have been the dominant academic and professional educators of many of the world's business executives (Starkey and Tiratsoo, 2007) .

In light of these, divergence supporters believe that cultural blindness, ethnocentrism and claims for universality have hounded the field of management and organizational theory as well as organizational change (Yaeger et al., 2006). These opinions advocate the divergence of cultures when working abroad, although those who consider convergence as the dominant paradigm have clear arguments as to why this is a more appropriate approach.

Convergence advocates argue that despite differences in politics, ideology and culture, the logic of industrialisation will generate economic and technological imperatives that force national management systems towards common patterns; furthermore they argue that similarities in production plants worldwide is evidence of the global convergence of operational and management processes (Kerr *et al.*, 1962; Beardwell and Holden, 2001). It has been suggested that the 'McDonaldization thesis'(Ritzer, 1993, 2001, 2010; Royle, 2000) is already evidence of a globally homogenous approach to HRM based on a dominant Anglo-American model. For these reasons, multinational corporations are urged to develop global strategies by adapting ownership-specific advantages to local market differences, exploit global economies of scale economies of global scope and have a strategic identification and selection of best locational advantages and employee resourcing practices (Kochan, Katz and McKersie, 1994).

Despite such claims, however, evidence exists to suggest that peculiar social and national factors remain defined and explained either as a consequence of “cultural” or “institutional differences” (Child, 1981, 2005; Hofstede, 1980; Hamden-Turner and Trompenaars, 1997; Rugman et al., 2006; Saidy Khan and Ackers, 2004; Budhwar and Debrah; 2001; Ferner and Quintanilla, 1998). The divergence arguments suggest that differences will persist because the content of practical specialisation that characterises growth in organisational size and complexity would vary according to ‘culture’ (Child, 1981); managerial attitudes and behaviours are influenced by national ‘dimensions of culture’ (Hofstede, 1980, 1994) or how nations deal with seven dimensions of cultures (Hamden-Turner and Trompenaars, 1997); and that the convergence hypothesis is based on analyses that focus on formal and broad features of organisational structure and ignore more informal (micro-level) aspects of organisational reality (Child, 1981).

These perspectives are in line with recent works in relation to states such as KSA and its Gulf neighbours where collectively the cultural influences are much stronger than those in more secular environments, where much of the initial work on convergence and divergence was conducted (Paik *et al.*, 2011). This gives more credence to the divergence perspective, or at the very least the potential for a dialectical approach which is somewhere between the two extremes (Khan, 2011).

Culture particularly has been the main focus in explanations for lack or potential lack of development of a universally homogenous HRM approach (Hofstede, 1980, Hamden-Turner and Trompenaars, 1997; Jackson, 2005). However, there are also increasing and persistence criticisms of “culture” as the only explanation for differences in management ideas and practices cross national context.

These criticisms centre on arguments that cross-cultural approaches tend to take external circumstances and view them as mere contingency, rather than part of a complex context with mutual effects that are often difficult to unravel and definitions of culture suffer from a “fallacy of surrogacy” with no clear distinction between nation and culture (Saidy Khan & Ackers, 2004). Earley and Singh’s (2000) critique centres on the idea of cultural relativism and the tendency to invoke idealist Western views while ignoring subtle influences of national/cultural contexts on HRM. Also, Child (1981, 2005) noted the lack of dynamic discourse of change (unrealistic notion of stable national and cultural contexts) and the assumption of wholesale convergence or divergence as opposed to convergence at some levels and divergence at others.

Some critics have therefore suggested analysis should focus not just on culture, but more tangible variables such as differences in institutional frameworks including, with relevance for this study, labour laws and institutions that regulate employment and HRM. To that end, Rugman et al., (2006) suggest a frame of “national culture” which should be based on two broad aspects. In effect, there is one aspect of national culture, which is at the “psychic or psychological levels”, and focuses on the “internalized” norms, attitudes and behavior of individuals and groups from a particular social context.

The other aspect is the Institutional explanations, which look at national (or group) norms and practices as *embodied* in, and shaped by man-made and controlled institutions (government, education, economic institutions as well as in business organizations). To reflect this conceptual dichotomy, the thesis embraces both social-cultural (psychosocial) and institutional factors (state and non-state institutions and regulatory frameworks) in the analysis in order to develop a more nuanced and holistic understanding of the factors which constrain and/or facilitate the labour situation of Saudi female graduates.



Thus, Thompson and McHugh (2009) suggest that in understanding which is dominant, convergence or divergence there is a need to recognize the “normative adaptations and rules that govern organisation as social rules embodied in institutional’ structures and “processes more than mental constructs carried about in people’s heads” (in Edwards and Rees, 2011, p. 38). In effect what this means is that culture, as understood in terms of national identity or characteristics may also manifest in terms of their labour market characteristics, the level of state intervention for example, market rates and recognised practices.

What this suggests in the case of these institutional explanations, is a connection to Dunlop’s (1958) systems theory, Beer et al.’s (1984)’s environmental factor influence on HR systems, and Hendry and Pettigrew (1990) argument that economic realities influence national legislation and therefore HRM policies and practices. This is certainly true in the Saudi context, where government policies and practices and specific regulations have made clear attempts to manipulate and manage the labour market and employment practices as evidenced by the quota requirement for Saudi nationals within an organisation in the context of the Nataqat programme (discussed in the preceding chapter) under the Saudisation policy framework (Alsheikh, 2015).

In the context of the convergence or divergence of labour markets therefore, whilst global factors such as technology and world economic situations and trends will certainly have an impact, there is likely, in the context of individual labour markets to be a local or national influence that is manifested in the HRM practices of the institutions within that area. This will this will be further considered when evaluating the overall study results.

It will suffice for now, to give the failures of Walmart's venture into the Germany market, which was attributed to, among other things, the impartibility of "Walmart's tradition of service with a smile approach, with employees chanting the name of the Store to raise moral' and 'ethics code, which included prohibiting sexual relations between employees", with German customer services tradition and law (Brewster et al., 2011: 24-25).

Another relevant example is the failure of HSBC recruitment and PRP policy in East Asia, which, according to Rowley et al. (2011), is because panel members charged with reviewing nominations, were not always keen on challenging each other or give negative criticisms for fear of making people 'lose face', which is culturally unacceptable in South East Asian society.

In wishing to evaluate this more succinctly and from the Saudi perspective as well, there is no better example of the process and impacts of convergence than the context of the American multinational company (MNC). Through the American MNC, it is highly apparent that management behaviour can be modified to a certain degree to meet the demands of the host country culture (Yaeger, et al., 2006). One fundamental logic to the convergence argument is that of the "race to the bottom" (Cao, 2006, p. 1). This refers to the global mobility, which is very common among IT firm, like Apple, Nokia, as well as non-tech firms like Nike, who subcontract standardised aspects of the production of their products to so-call sweat shops in low cost labour economies like India, China, Thailand (Klein, 2000). Some say, more importantly, finance, that exerts competitive pressure on national economies and leads to efforts to develop more business-friendly economic policies and institutions so that the domestic arena becomes more attractive to global investors.

In this regard, Saudi Arabia has always been recognized as having great potential to be a formidable international economic player (Robertson et al. 2001). Its vast natural resources and human resources as well as its strategic location place the country at the centre of a global stage that serves as “an attractive theatre for competing global powers” (Robertson et al., 2001, p. 224). As trade with Saudi Arabia continues unabated, there is a need for other nations – especially Western ones – to understand its complexity and diversity.

Using the divergent-convergent debate as framework, there are analysts and observers who note that Saudi Arabia may ultimately adopt a free-enterprise system and values of the West as they climb the development ladder although as Afiouni *et al.* (2013) note, this will be with an overlay of the Saudi and Islamic cultural values, in much the same way that Chinese HRM has adapted western practices to suit Chinese traditions and beliefs (Nankervis *et al.*, 2013; Cooke, 2005; Zhang et al., 2005).

By adopting this middle approach the culture of the country, which is highly powerful, is not subsumed by global values but is able to adapt to a changing labour market. This will be particularly important in relation to the development of HR practices which encourage female participation in the labour market, and conform to the idea of cross-vergence (Robertson *et al.*, 2001). This constructs believes that a unique set of values and practices are developed which incorporate both external and internal influences. To test the existence or potential for the emergence of Western paradigms of HRM in Saudi Arabia, the study took a comparative approach in terms of organisational and institutional contexts, including foreign and domestic corporations and institutions as well as the breadth of literature reviewed.

Until recently, the perception was that Saudi Arabian management was directionless and fragmented (Robertson, et al., 2001). The rapid shift towards industrialization without the creation of a modernized managerial model led to a number of problems in the Arab world such as cultural discontinuity that could be seen as barriers to management.

This was combined with the influence of tribal codes of loyalty and honour which demand strong in-group and tribal identity and security, combined with a strong patriarchal family structure has been powerful enough to impact management decision making and MNCs have had to adjust to this (At-Twajiri 1989). However, as Khan and Varshney (2013) highlight, intervention from the state and a growing recognition of the importance of development has reduced some of these issues and a more transformational approach is now being seen within the country.

At the same time, there has also been indications that there remain strong authoritative structures within organisations that are highly traditional and pervasive (Lust, 2011). Most of all, it must be noted that in Saudi Arabia, Islam forms the foundation for legal, political and business environments. Due to the country being seen as the birthplace of Islam and its assumed religious leadership for Muslims around the globe it is seen as one of the most devout and fundamental Islamic states, despite its links to western economies (Niblock, 2013).

Furthermore, the divergence debate gains additional credence when considering gender differences, with women in the country being expected to adhere to social roles that are delineated in the Qur'an, despite the increase in education and the State's intent for their increased participation in the labour market. These divergences from the views in developed countries are also added to the view of age and ageing, as Saudi nationals believe that as people age, they acquire and retain more information that generates greater accuracy or diversity of beliefs, which would appear to be at odds with (for a lack of better expression) the low power distance (Hofstede, 1980) culture of the west (Shultz and Adams, 2012) and thus leads to a further area of divergence.

In a study conducted by Robertson *et al.*, (2001), the investigators note that Saudi workers are more open to decision making across levels of an organization compared with Omani counterparts.

It would seem that the reason for this is the strong Islamic value on egalitarianism that has been less tainted by external influences. However, this finding is expected to generate opposition because numerous studies have evidenced that Saudi Arabian decision making processes are highly authoritative (Ali, 2009). These cultural values and differences in decision-making and management styles have therefore led to conflicts between multinational corporations and Saudi culture, despite attempts at convergence or even cross – vergence (Horwitz et al., 2002).

These arguments are worth consideration because can add to our understanding of some of the cultural and organisational factors, which may impact female labour market participation in Saudi Arabia.

#### **4.3.5 Sheikh capitalism: Multinationals and Saudi Culture**

There is a controversial perspective stating that what is good for multinational companies (MNCs) is good for the people (Ali, 2009). Moreover, the same belief expands to state that the interests of the MNCs do not automatically diverge from the interests of host nations. This means to say that it is more the norm than the exception for MNCs to cultivate compatible interests with a host nation and the latter's citizens. Saudi Arabia has adopted a free form of market economy known as Sheikh Capitalism (Ali, 2010).

The essence of this form of capitalism is that it refers to the fact that the market economy depends on the wishes of the ruler, and is frequently characterized by inadequate institutional arrangements and procedures, due to the fact that “the supremacy of the ruler's will in determining when and how to interfere or manage market mechanisms, trade and market being in the service of the government not vice versa,” this has led to “a weak management tradition and professionalism, and a propensity to “tolerate fraud and corruption, especially when committed by influential individuals” (Ali, 2010, p. 496).

Sheikh Capitalism is an institutionalized mechanism that is intended to protect the interests of the ruling elite, co-opt national actors while at the same time, satisfying the demands of global forces such as the United States which Saudi Arabia considers as its protector of the free trade economy. The underlying approach is that it is capitalism but operated within the constraints and beliefs of Islamic practice for business, although despite the strong Islamic elements of the approach, Sheikh Capitalism also strongly favours MNCs.

This is best illustrated by an example in 1993 when then American President Bill Clinton induced the King of Saudi Arabia to place an order from Boeing and McDonnell Douglas, both MNCs, to an estimated amount of \$6.2 billion for various aircraft. President Clinton announced the purchase even before the purported buyer, Saudi Arabian Airlines even knew about it. This incident actually broke the rule stating that an order is never considered finalized until it is announced by the customer (Ali, 2010). A second incident was when Saudi Arabia awarded a contract to AT&T for the modernization of the country's communications system. Evidence points to the intervention of President Clinton in the awarding of the contract, which is believed to be "hundreds of millions of dollars higher than other bids" (Ali, 2010, p. 497).

Indeed, there are similar incidences but these examples suffice to illustrate that Saudi Arabia could not have been where it is now economically without the presence of MNCs but also important is the role of the leading figures in the country who conducted the negotiations for inward investment and developed the overall strategies and frameworks under which the MNCs could operate in the strongly Islamic country. However, it is important to note that in spite of the position of MNCs in the Saudi Arabian market, the freedoms that they are allowed and the conditions for their success and expansion are all dependent on the ruling elite and their visions. This makes for a complex scenario because the nature of MNCs conflict with local culture.

The decided strengths of the MNC are in its “sophisticated technology, available capital, fostering export capability, diversifying the production base, product differentiation, global scale of operations, and the ability to play countries against one another” (Ali, 2010, p. 507). However, in the case of Saudi Arabia, the bargaining power of MNCs does not have the same impact mainly because the country is already capital-rich (Al-Asfour and Khan, 2013).

Businesses and the public sector are seeking business know-how, networking, and insights into new or emerging opportunities and enhancing capacity so that the economy becomes diversified and enabled to compete in both domestic and global markets, which creates a more challenging environment for MNCs (Mellahi *et al.*, 2011). This is one conflict between MNCs, who generally are concerned with brand protection and profit maximisation, less with developing local skills for purposes of national economic competitiveness. In the pursuit of profit and reliance on contemporary US and European business practices and traditions in relation to labour market roles of women, US multinational practices may conflict with local Saudi Arabia culture in terms of gender relations and, therefore, be source of divergence of interests.

This can restrict Saudi women’s access to employment that may or may not wish to work for MNCs or are restricted due to the regulations placed on their working practices by society and religion in the country. In that case, as pointed out in the preceding section, a degree of cross-vergence that embraces some aspects of both cultures may provide some solution. However, even then, the possibility that one culture may dominate has potential to generate conflict.

There can however be even deeper underlying conflict in terms of language and cultural beliefs and values. For instance, the culture of MNCs, in terms of dominant influences within, may be such that they would want to establish their own modernistic practices at the expense of national culture (Ali, 2010).

In the MNCs' quest for finding and establishing a market for their products and services, MNCs have a propensity to influence the national customs, thoughts, beliefs, values and behaviour of the host nation (Parhizgar, 2013). The powerful information and communication systems that these MNCs can harness play an important role in generating specific patterns of consumption which suggests that there could be clashes with the strongly traditional and religious foundations of the Saudi culture.

In terms of how this affects women's participation in the labour market, even if MNCs were openly recruiting females, there is the potential that family pressure may prevent educated females from taking a role within the firms as it would be seen as against their own beliefs or those of their families (Marmenout and Lirio, 2014).

MNCs in Islamic states have frequently encountered challenges in relation to honouring Islamic law and respecting Saudi culture and as a result have had to find ways to adapt operations to accommodate, for example, the right to pray several times a day, women being unable to drive, the prohibition of union activity and the state view that democracy constitutes a threat to national security (Ali, 2010; Budwar & Debrah, 2003; Seiple *et al.*, 2013; and Allam, 2012).

More relevant to this work is the fact that women are prohibited from working in particular sectors, because Islam requires genders to be segregated and some Saudi men do not like and will refuse to work for female managers, whether nationals or expatriates (Gassim *et al.*, 2012; Kataria and Sethi, 2013). This has thus caused major difficulties for MNCs who are dealing with the Saudi culture and its influences on the practices and process of the labour market (Calvert and Al-Shetaiwi, 2002). Crucially, it has severe implications for labour access and position of Saudi women in general. With respect to graduate women who are a major focus of this study, it means aspirations that have driven them to pursue higher education are, after all, unlikely to be realised.



At the level of national economic and social policy, the cultural and social constraints that limit graduate women's labour market opportunities are a contradiction to the national socioeconomic objectives that are behind the increased investment in higher education and skills development and, more directly, the Saudisation initiative.

This does not mean that the challenges are insurmountable. Frequently negotiated government concessions can be achieved if the issues are seen as essential to business growth although there is, by MNCs normally avoidance of politically or religious sensitive issues. While such actions may be perceived as corruption, in the Saudi context, such actions may be socially justified as 'Maslaha' (compromise) (Alhabshi & Ghazali, 1994). At the same time as Common (2013 in Bemish, 2013) notes, MNCs should avoid seeking to influence policymakers to change their attitudes because doing this could potentially compromise their current and future operations. Therefore, even if MNCs wanted to influence labour market policy due to a desire to take advantage of the increasing number of available highly educated females it is unlikely that they will be working with the State on developing processes to achieve this due to the potential for future negative impacts.

Having identified that practices of MNCs, the culture of the host country and globalisation may all influence HRM processes and how this could impact in the context of Saudi Arabia, there remains a suggestion that flexibility is a clear option, as not only could it encourage greater female participation in the labour market but also reduce the impact of cultural factors which could affect the achievement of convergence or cross-vergence in the state and the MNCs which operate there. Understanding this, and recognising how flexibility on a global basis may have relevance to the situation in Saudi Arabia it is thus pertinent to examine briefly the effects of labour market flexibility in other regions of the world.

The analysis of the literature, which is itemised below, demonstrates two fundamental outcomes. First, with regard to labour market theory and its application to the concerned context, the review indicates that, even in the so-called advanced economies, the rhetoric of free market neoclassical arguments is diluted by extensive policy interventions. Consequently, voluntarist, predominantly free market regulated internal labour markets operate within external labour markets that operate under significant institutional interference.

Secondly, with respect to flexibility, the review, unsurprisingly, highlights the inherent conclusions around flexible employment practices. In that regard, they are at once viewed as mutually beneficial to organisations and employees and, at the same time, as insecure and exploitative forms of employment.

On the issue of labour market theories therefore, in the case of Saudi Arabia, in addition government intervention, wider social influences also have decisive influence over the labour market. As a result, there are a considerable number of problems outstanding, which in the context of Saudi female participation, particularly for graduates need to be addressed and resolved if the situation is to show positive change.

- a) The Saudi labour market shows the effects of somewhat limited labour market flexibility, in that it is deeply divided and has relatively low native labour market participation especially in terms of women's participation in the market, despite the increased number of graduate females in the country (Wood and Mellahi, 2002, 2005; Mellahi, 2000; IPA, 1999). According to the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Economic Planning (2009), the Saudi labour market is historically characterized by low labour market participation by Saudi citizens; lack of existing vocational skills and ability to develop skills; inability to keep up with skill changes demanded by

changes in government strategy; organizational and institutional weakness; flexibility technology substitution for skills; and deep divides between worker groups (Saudi and immigrant, and public and private sector). Whilst some of the reasons behind this are the time involved in developing the education and training facilities in the country and the skills gap that resulted from the rapid move from agriculture to industry there is also an indication that lack of flexibility in the market may be a factor.

- b) Flexibility in the workplace and access to the labour market is restricted by the strict Islamic codes that exist in relation to the role of women in the workplace, and their working in specific environments and in segregated positions. For this to change and increase overall participation there needs to be a level of social change and acceptance of women's important economic role in the Kingdom, particularly in terms of utilising the increased literacy and degree level education achievements of the female population.
- c) Employing Saudi citizens is more expensive than employing foreigners, both directly (in terms of higher wage expectations) and indirectly (in the form of benefits and legal protections) (UNDP, 2005a). In most economies migrant workers do not compete with local worker stocks, but are instead concentrated in areas where there is a gap in the local labour market in terms of skills or other characteristics; however, this is not true of Saudi Arabia (Piore 1979, Borjas, 1994; Mellahi and Wood, 2002) which partly for the reasons indicated previously has led to the predominance of foreign labour in the country. However, it is also clear that there are other factors which have affected the increase in Saudi national employment and thus the rising rates of unemployment, particularly of educated females.

d) Native workers view Public Sector work as more prestigious than private sector work. Therefore, whilst the most recent labour market developments have been focused on improving the local labour market, especially in private industry sectors (due to on-going hiring freezes and attempts to ramp down public sector employment) (Mellahi and Wood, 2000), these efforts have been stymied by both this view and employer unwillingness to hire native workers.

e) Forcing a formal Saudisation policy in which firms were required to hire local workers before hiring immigrants is generally discouraged by the WTO and GATT (Niessen, 2000). Thus, there is still a problem in Saudi Arabia, as there has been historically, of low native citizen participation in the labour market, especially in the growing private sector.

f) Implementing labour market flexibility goals will require substantial attention to be paid to developing appropriate regulations and laws, balancing labour market flexibility and worker rights, and challenging existing norms regarding the labour market in order to break down the barriers between the divided labour force (Reilly, 2001).

Against the background of all these challenges, the conditions in Saudi Arabia as well as other petroleum-based monarchies in the Middle East have not so far been conducive to the development of flexible labour markets, given that the emphasis has been placed on labour protections and indigenization programmes (including the Saudisation programme), all of which have contributed to reduced labour market flexibility (Cammett & Posusney, 2010).

What all this means is that the labour market in the country, and thus the potential for female graduate entry will require identification and resolution of these factors before major transformations can be achieved. The identification of these factors is thus the major focus of this study.

#### 4.5 SUMMARY

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This chapter aimed to review the theoretical issues and arguments relating to the trends and potential trajectory of the labour market and employment practices in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. At the same time, the intent was to provide a brief overview of HRM practices in a global and local context. To achieve this, consideration was given to conceptual debates around the nature of the labour market and the changes that have occurred in a global sense since the 1980s. Reference has been made to changing working patterns both globally and more specifically how these might apply in the Saudi Arabian labour market.

This was achieved by looking at the different definitions of, and types of, labour market that can exist, before evaluating how the labour market impacts on HRM practices in regard to pay, recruitment and selection. In that respect, perspectives were presented on the neoclassical theories, with particular note being made of their inability to account for pay differentials. This led to the view that a more robust explanation of the relationship between the labour market and HRM practices and policies was required, which incorporated the impact of labour market institution and other factors which will affect the behaviour and dynamics of labour markets.

Through considering the changes that have occurred in the past three decades and the roles of globalisation and economic restructuring in the evolution of the labour market, it was highlighted that there were comparisons that could be made between developing and developed economies and countries.

In particular the diminishment of manufacturing and mining sectors in developed economies with a concurrent smaller increase in these industries in developing countries has had major consequences for the profile of labour markets on a global scale. It was noted that one of these consequences was the increase in flexible working, including increase in shift working, agency employment, greater female participation in the workplace and a more direct relationship between employers and employees, rather than a reliance on collective voice through unions or other trade associations.

This led to a review of different types of flexibility and how they can be utilised within an HRM context to improve competitiveness but also offer more opportunities for labour market entry. This was seen as particularly pertinent given the aim of the work in respect to female graduates in Saudi Arabia. Throughout the chapter, reference was made to the Saudi context, and sections relating to work force demographics, the economic structure of the country and the legislative and governmental initiatives that have impacted on the construct and management of the labour market.

Much of the literature points to the contradictions that have characterised Saudi Arabia's attempts to respond to the potential impacts of globalisation on national concerns and the necessity to recognise and respond to the globalisation imperative. The latter has compelled Saudi Arabia to, where possible present the view that they are following the dictates of the global economic regimes that define and govern the processes of economic globalisation, even though these have potentially adverse effects on how nation states address their specific national economic and social concerns.

This contradiction, with particular relevance to labour market and employment governance for Saudi Arabia, has meant that the government has had to adopt policy initiatives that aim to achieve the desire for acceptance by the global institutions who are anti-

protectionism in regards to employment policy but at the same time to ensure that Saudi nationals are protected in regards to labour policy so that high unemployment and social unrest do not occur. Furthermore, recognising the high expatriate levels in the country, the government has commenced a Saudisation policy designed to increase the number of nationals within the labour market, including females.

However, whilst the overall policy focus of the government suggests that there is a focus on a private sector employment agenda in respect to Saudisation, public sector monopolies like Saudi Aramco, Saudi Telecoms (STC) and SABIC continue to dominate the Saudi Arabian economy and are the largest employers. These public enterprises and the public sector in general remain the largest player in the Saudi labour market and most attractive employers, offering by far, the best pay and conditions. For that reason perhaps, most Saudi citizens consider public sector employment more prestigious and therefore desirable.

Conversely, the chapter notes that private sector employers and MNCs are reticent to employ Saudi citizens due to the relatively higher cost and difficulty of employing and managing them. Consideration was also given to the cultural variations between MNCs and the Saudi workforce and how, within an HRM framework, these can be balanced to provide an effective labour market both internal and external which ensures reduced unemployment for Saudi nationals but provides competitive advantage for the MNCs.

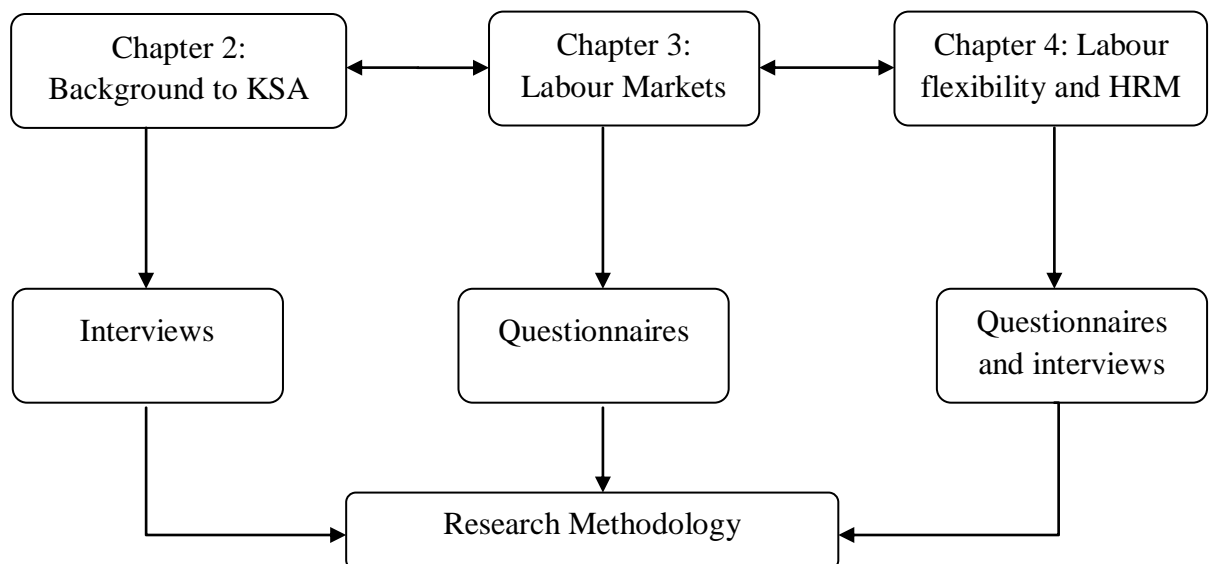
With all these views and theoretical constructs in relation to the labour market, flexibility within this and how it impacts on HRM and the specific Saudi context, it was also noted that beyond the goal of Saudisation of the labour market, there is no evidence that Saudi Arabia has considered alternative employment forms and practices. Furthermore, whilst the government has invested in female education and recognised the contribution that women can make to the labour market, and thus the economy, there has been no consistent or focused attention given to resolving specific problems that led to the Saudisation agenda.

For example, increasing opportunities for female graduates with flexible labour market policies, expanding the areas in which women can work and increasing overall vocational training within the country are all potential solutions that could aid in achieving the overall Saudisation agenda and improving prospects for Saudi nationals, particularly female graduates, within the country's labour market.

All of the concepts, constructs, theories and contextual issues covered in this and preceding chapters have underlined the need to take an imaginative, carefully constructed and consistent approach to delivering solutions to the real and potential employment problems which could be faced by Saudi Arabia in general and, in particular, the increasingly well-educated female graduate population. These should be solutions that offer this group greater options for entering the labour market and developing within it.

The preceding discussions raise issues which, thus, reinforce the aims of the study to examine the potential for flexible policies and forms of employment for addressing the employment problems encountered by female graduates in Saudi Arabia. The resultant overall direction of this research study is presented in Figure 4.6, which shows how the aspects from Chapter 1 to Chapter 4 lead into the methodology chapter, which is covered next and, subsequently, the empirical aspects of the study.

FIGURE 4.6: PICTORIAL PRESENTATION OF THE RESEARCH STUDY'S DIRECTION





## CHAPTER 5 : RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

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### 5.1. INTRODUCTION

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This chapter gives an overview of the research process adopted in this study. It sets out the research philosophy, methodology, and methods adopted. It starts by defining the meaning of research, highlights the concept of research and further outlines the type of research undertaken. It then identifies the research philosophies and the theoretical perspectives which underpin the choice of strategy, which in turn informs the methods by which data were collected and analysed to answer the research questions and achieve the stated aims and objectives.

The critical issues of reliability and validity of the instruments and data are covered here. These provide the basis for the rationale for and justification of sampling strategy and selection. The chapter concludes with a brief reflection on research experience, which also provides the basis for some suggestion for the direction of future research.

### 5.2. RESEARCH DEFINITION AND CONCEPTS

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According to Stronack (2006, p. 758 in Denzin, 2009, p. 139), “there is a current dispute between qualitative and quantitative research. It is international, acrimonious”. This dispute is not by any means new, but rather, it represents the reactions to post – war adoption of positivist philosophy and methods of inquiry in social science research – the so-called research paradigm war (Denscombe, 2008, p. 272). This “war” concerns competing philosophical orientations about what constitutes the best way to investigate and understand social reality and in that regard, traditionally, the literature tends to categorise social science research into two broad philosophical paradigms of deductive and inductive research (Bryman, 1988; 2006; Guba et al., 2005; Denzin, 2009).

The essential differences and arguments about these competing philosophies will be discussed in relatively greater detail elsewhere later in this chapter. For now, it suffices to say that the deductive paradigm assumes a positivist philosophy, which, traditionally take a “one-way mirror” view of the social reality (Guba et al., 2005, p. 201) and, therefore, argues that the research process should be uncontaminated by the subjective views of the researcher. The inductive paradigm, on the other hand, rests on the argument that reality is socially constructed and therefore, subject to different perceptions and interpretations (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Bryman, 2008). Consequently, the researcher must give up the pretence that social science research is carried out by ‘non-human beings’ (Bell and Newby, 1977). Most contemporary analyses of social science research methodology have their genesis, directly or indirectly, in Weber’s sociology of value free research (in Gerth and Wright Mills, 2009). Weber argues that the social science researcher must make a clear distinction between “empirical observation and value judgement” (Leming, 1989, p. 37). Weber’s argument has had resonance in both qualitative and quantitative paradigms of social science research methodologies. In the case of the former, ethnographic traditions of the reproduction model (Hammersley, 1992) and the thick description of Geertz (1983) advocate privileging the voice and view of the source of the information over and above the value judgement of the researcher. The earliest advocates of the quantitative paradigm include Moser (1958) and later Moser and Kalton (1967), who argue for social science research to embrace survey methods in social investigation.

To a large extent, these competing philosophical orientations about social reality and how it should be investigated and understood, account for the varying conceptions about research and research methodology. The literature on research methodology and methods, therefore, contains many different definitions and arguments on research, research methodology and methods. Indeed, it could be argued that there are no specific and standard consensus definitions of what research really means (Collis and Hussey, 2009).

Research can be defined as finding out something that is unknown (Phillips and Pugh, 2005). Burns (2000) opined that research is a systematic investigation to finding answers to a problem. However, the OECD (2002b), sees “research as the creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of humanity, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications”.

Research is a systematic and careful inquiry or an examination to discover new information or relationships and to expand/verify existing knowledge for some particular reason(s) (Smith and Dainty, 1991). Sekaran (2003, p. 5) defines research as “an organised, systematic, data-based, critical, objective, scientific inquiry or investigation into specific problem, undertaken with the purpose of finding answers or solutions to it”. It is a studious investigation or experimentation with the aim of discovery and interpreting facts, as well as revising accepted theories or laws in the light of new facts, or practical application of such new or revised theories or law. Rajasekar et al. (2013) aver that it is a logical and systematic search for innovative and relevant information on a particular topic. It is a process to enquire and investigate, systematically and methodologically to increase knowledge. Furthermore, research is characterized by a well-organized process which adopts the best use of opportunities and available resources and systematically employs appropriate methods to collect and analyze data that addresses the research problem(s) and increases knowledge (Saunders et al. 2012; Collis & Hussey 2003; Amaratunga et al., 2002; Roufehaei, Hassan Abu Bakar, & Tabassi, 2013).

Following Bryman’s (2006) advice against methodological dogma and, instead, that although researchers should indicate their epistemological position, the overriding concern must be their research objectives, underpinning theory and the practical circumstances of research.

Following from that pragmatic view, this study about whether and how far "labour flexibility" offers solutions to unemployment among educated Saudi females, opts for a mixed methods approach. Denscombe describes this as "the third paradigm of social research" (2008: 270), using a multiple case study design based on a combination of private, public and public/private sector organisations in Saudi Arabia and survey and documentary analysis methods of data collection. The rationale, as explained in detail later, is to achieve a good degree of research credibility through triangulation of methods and sources of data (Denzin, 2012; Bryman and Bell, 2011). The case for using the mixed methods will be elaborated later. For now, however, it may be useful to indicate that the researcher's choice is inspired by the arguments that, the use of what Denscombe calls the 'communities of practice' (2008: 270) enables is a practical way to accommodate and manage the level of complexity and contradictions that surround the issues of research.

Even so, there are important points to be considered in conducting research. These include (i) design/ strategy and methods to be employed and (ii) how the choice of strategy is justified (Crotty, 1998). Based on these definitions it is clear that conducting research must first be initiated with a clear purpose, to understand the reality of how knowledge will be gained through a step by step process of choosing the best suitable strategy that will enable data to be collected and analysed to define problems, proffer recommendable solutions and increase knowledge in the area being studied. Therefore, the type of research, how it is approached, strategy and methods are important in research methodology, which will be the focus of discussions in this chapter of the study.

As indicated earlier, the researcher's philosophical orientation needs to be dictated by their purpose and their practical circumstance. Accordingly, there are various purposes for which research may be conducted, which are grouped under general categories descriptive, exploratory, explanatory and predictive (Saunders et al, 2012; Wisker, 2008; Chapman & Mcneill, 2005; Collis & Hussey 2003). These categories are now explored both for theoretical purposes, but especially in terms of their relevance to my research undertaking.

Chapman and Mcneill (2005. p.7), suggest that descriptive research aims to “describe in detail a situation or set of circumstance” and seeks to provide answers to such questions on how many, who and what. Accordingly, descriptive research enables an accurate profile of events, persons or situations. It encompasses the study which informs about the status of a wide range of social indicators and initiates questions that may necessitate further exploration to provide some explanations as to why such phenomenon exists (Saunders et al, 2012; Collis & Hussey 2003; Robson 2002).

Descriptive research usually adopts quantitative or statistical techniques to collect and summarise the data (De Vaus, 2001). In other words, when conducting this type of research, it points towards an overview of the various characteristics that exist in a phenomenon and not necessarily the reasons why the phenomenon exists. In those terms, the current study concerning the possibilities of flexibility as redress for the poor labour market situation of Saudi female graduates goes beyond the description of the phenomena encompassed (e.g. statistical data on female graduates, educational attainment and labour market participation). However, it goes without saying that such data is central to the contextualisation of the phenomenon of inquiry and the circumstances for its existence.

Consequently, aspects of the overall study such as data on numbers of female graduates, female graduate labour market participation fall within the descriptive paradigm of social science research.

Saunders et al. (2012), defines exploratory research as a valuable way to discover and gain in depth knowledge about a topic of interest by asking open questions. In their opinion, the ways in which exploratory research may be conducted include critical review of literature and interviews, which will rely on the quality of information provided by the research participants. Collis and Hussey (2003), argue that exploratory research is conducted to gain insight into a problem where there are limited earlier investigations and are likely to adopt qualitative measures.

Furthermore, the purpose of the exploratory research is to investigate and find patterns, ideas, hypotheses or generate theories from the study of the situation (Collis & Hussey 2003). Hence exploratory research is carried out to help clarify as well as give in – depth understanding to an existing situation to ascertain the problems and create avenues for more rigorous future investigations. The relevance of the type of research to the current study is obvious. The literature and documentary evidence provide some descriptive and explanatory information about the female high education enrolment, labour market participation and the nature of social relations in Saudi society. However, the review of literature and public policy and private sector data provides hardly any information about how these various phenomena interact and account for the bane of unemployment among Saudi female graduates in spite of policy interventions such as Saudisation and Nitaqat. The researcher has tried to explore that interrelation through multiple case studies that looks at these phenomena in their various spheres of existence and interaction drawing on the views of those who live that experience using mixed methods of data collection and analysis.

Explanatory research is, in many ways, an extension of descriptive research in the sense that it seeks to provide further explanation for how and why a phenomenon is happening or has happened and may adopt both quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate and explain phenomenon (Collis and Hussey, 2003). Vaus (2001) posits that this type of research can be used to understand why a particular trend occurs over a period in a place or at diverse places and, according to Saunders et al. (2012), it is useful for establishing “causal relationships between variables” by investigating a phenomenon with the purpose of explaining the situation based on connecting variables.

However Chapman and Mcneill (2005), consider that although it seeks to answer the “why” questions it is difficult to differentiate descriptive and explanatory research because any explanation will involve description and *vice versa*, but De Vaus (2001) further argues that description only gives an overview of the status of an occurrence but explanation seeks to find why that occurrence exists in order to proffer solutions. Hence, the explanatory research is adopted to provide answers when the questions asked is why and how a phenomenon exists which will uncover the relationship(s) between the causes and effect of the variables that are associated with the phenomenon.

Accordingly, this study also includes aspects that fit with explanatory type of study. In that regard, to the extent that study seeks answers to the question of why Saudi female graduates find labour market entry difficult, it also involves an explanatory purpose. To achieve that objective, the study sought explanations as to why, despite government intervention in terms of investment in female higher education and direct labour market policies like Saudisation and Nitaqat, descriptive data still shows no significant improvement in the labour market position of the increasing number of Saudi female graduates.

Vaus (2001) views this type of research as part of the explanatory research but in Collis and Hussey (2003) opinion it is a continuation of explanatory research which forecasts the tendency for a similar situation in a particular context to occur elsewhere by generalizing from hypotheses predicting certainties. It seeks to provide answers to questions on “how” “where” and “why”. Therefore this type of research predicts similar occurrences in different contexts.

Although the current study is confined to Saudi Arabia and the specific issues flexibility and labour market status of female graduates, the review of theory has examined literature on these phenomena in other national contexts. The study involves some predictive research to the extent that it has explored and attempts to draw on examples from similar economic, social and cultural contexts that have also adopted similar labour market policies, (for example indigenisation policies in other Gulf countries like the Emirates), to predict the outcomes.

As pointed out throughout this section and elsewhere in the thesis, this study explores the challenges women face as part of employment practices in KSA and the number that actually are employed through the labour market, together with ascertaining the relationship that exist between the level of education women in Saudi Arabia have achieved, and the relative ease of gaining employment. Hence, the study combines both an explanatory and exploratory research element. The preceding discussions have described and evaluate different types of research in terms of their respective purposes and, how they apply to the current study. The following section revisits and elaborates on the discussions about the ideas and debates surrounding research philosophy and research methodology.



Research methodology is the overall process to be employed in a study of a phenomenon from the theoretical underpinnings to collection and analysis of data to arrive at a credible result that informs or improves on the phenomenon or phenomena. It is the science and art of planning procedures for conducting the research in order to produce the most valid findings. The philosophical framework that relates to the entire procedure of conducting the research and emphasizes more on the rationale and philosophical assumptions underlying a specific study rather than just the collection of methods (Saunders et. al 2012; Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2011; Yin, 2009; Wisker, 2008; Collis & Hussey 2003; and Creswell 2003; Crotty, 1998; Vogt 1993 cited in Collis & Hussey, 2003).

The concept of research methodology or approach embodies and is informed by research-type (purpose) and philosophies, which are essential to inform the rationale for theoretical perception, strategy and method (Gray 2004). It is therefore important to understand these underlying assumptions in terms of the strength and weaknesses to achieve a successful outcome of the research. Hence, research methodology, in any study and, for that matter, in the context of this study, is the systematic structure which embodies the philosophical assumptions, design/strategy and method as well as their interrelationship for which the purpose of research can be effectively achieved.

### **5.4.1 Research Philosophy**

Research is not ‘neutral’, but rather reflects a range of the researcher’s personal interests, values, capabilities, assumptions, purpose and ambitions. Research philosophy is the term that relates to the development of knowledge and contains the assumptions of how the world is viewed from different stand points. This is a crucial parameter to inform the researcher on why the need to research relating to the predetermined assumptions concerning the inter-related concepts (Holden & Lynch, 2004).

As pointed out earlier in this chapter in reference to the ‘paradigm war’ (Denscombe, 2008), the traditional dispute in social research was traditionally caste in terms of opposing ontological, epistemological and oxiology positions, which are in turned defined in terms of positivism versus interpretivism methodologies (Guba, Lincoln and Yvonna, 2005). As indicated in Table 5.1 below, are further defined in terms of the extent to which research outcomes measure against subjectivity and objectivity criteria (Morgan and Smircich, 1980 in Holden and Lynch, 2004).

A review of philosophy is vital to the research process because it informs the researchers on possibilities and skills in the research as well as enhances confidence in adopting the appropriate strategy. Morgan and Smircich (1980 cited in Holden & Lynch, 2004 ) summarized perspective of the assumptions along the continuums as shown in Table 5.1. However these philosophical assumptions are discussed based on the two main ends of the continuum.

TABLE 5.1: NETWORK OF BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

Subjectivism				Objectivism		
ontological assumptions (reality)	Reality as a projection of human imagination	Reality as a social construct	Reality as a realm of symbolic discourse	Reality as a contextual field of information	Reality as a concrete process	Reality as a concrete structure
Interpretivism				Positivism		
Epistemologic al assumptions (Knowledge)	To obtain phenomenol ogical understandin g	To understand social reality is created	To understand patterns of symbolic discourse	To map context	To study systems process and change	To construct a positivist science

**Source: adapted from Morgan and Smircich (1980 cited in Holden and Lynch (2004)**

Ontology is concerned with the nature and concept of existence (Saunders et al. 2012; Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2011). Crotty (1998) defines ontology as the study of being, concerned with “what is reality?” and the “science of being” (Blaikie 1993). Holden and Lynch (2004), assert that there are varying philosophical stances aligned within the continuums of assumptions relating to ontological position. Unlike epistemology, which is concerned in the philosophy of what constitutes knowledge worth knowing and how it might be known, ontological position is about one’s view of what constitutes reality and how existence might be understood – is about the investigation into the nature of reality (Healy and Perry, 2000). Therefore, according to Saunders et al (2012), ontology matters to the extent that it invites discussions about one’s assumptions about how the “world operates and the commitment held to a particular view” (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 20). As pointed out earlier and underscored in table 5.1 and also by Creswell (2008) the ontological argument in social research often centres on the extent to which assumptions are in reality either objective and/or subjective.

Subjectivism is the stance created from the perception and consequent actions of the social factors which are studying a situation to understand what is happening or the reality occurring behind what is happening based on the interpretations of meanings from social actors (Saunders et al. 2012). Subjectivism, according to Creswell (1994 cited in Collis and Hussey, 2003) is viewed as “socially constructive”, which refers to the understanding of a situation by examining and considering the viewpoints of human actors. Crotty (1998) further notes that it is reality which is somehow confined to the mind - only ideas.

Objectivism is an ontological stance where social entities exist in reality but are external and independent of the social actors (Saunders et al. 2012). Creswell (1994 cited in Collis and Hussey, 2003) asserts this stance as where reality is seen as objective and external to the researcher, while Crotty (1998) rather avers this stance as asserting that reality exists outside the mind.

Epistemology is concerned with the study of knowledge, based on what is expected to be valid and acceptable knowledge in a field of study. It also involves the examination of what is being researched in relation to the researcher (Saunders et al. 2007). Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011) pointed out that this philosophical assumption is the relationship that exists between the researcher and what is being researched. Conversely, Crotty (1998, p. 3) asserted that “epistemology is a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know”.

Epistemology therefore is concerned with providing a philosophical context to decide what type of knowledge is possible and how to ensure that it is both adequate and legitimate (Maynard 1994). In addition, it weighs with the possibility, scope and general basis for the researcher to gain knowledge of the world (Harlyn 1995 cited in Crotty 1998; Hughes and Sharrock 1997:5 cited in Holden & Lynch, 2004). This implies that both the subject and object are actively participating in the creation of the meaning (Guba and Lincoln, 1998, 2005). Epistemology is also viewed from two main continuum-interpretivism, and positivism (Saunders et al. 2012), Anti-positivism and positivism (Burrell and Morgan 1979 cited in Holden and Lynch (2004), objectivism and subjectivism Crotty (1998). While they all explain the same concept, for uniformity and clarity the term positivism and interpretivism will be adopted and used to denote the terms in the context of this study.

Positivism is the epistemological philosophical stance used in natural science and believes that credible data can only be obtained from an observable reality and search for regularities and relationships (Saunders et al. 2012). It believes that meaningful reality exists even when the researcher is not aware. Crotty (1998) in his work further explained it as where a phenomenon exists whether or not the researcher is aware of its existence and discovering a meaning of what already exists is only an objective truth. Hence positivism is based on the laws of cause and effects by rational means (Remenyi et al., 1998).

Interpretivism is an epistemological stance that asserts that data is collected subjectively and the details of the phenomenon interpreted based on subjective meanings motivating the action. This is when “meaning does not come out of interplay between the subject and the object but rather imposed on the object by the subject” (Saunders et al., 2012). Collis and Hussey (2003) in their opinion refer this stance in the continuum as where the researcher interacts with what is being researched. Hence, interpretivism gives details of rich insights into the complex world involving human roles and conducting research among people rather than object essential to interpret the phenomena, (Remenyi 1998).

Another vital stance in interpretivism that is gaining ground in social science research as viewed by Crotty (1998) and Creswell & Plano-Clark (2011) is constructive-interpretivism which is adopted by most qualitative researchers and comes into existence when one engages with the reality of the world and interprets the meaning with the mind. Hence meanings are not discovered but constructed. This interpretivist assumption further states that “what we sense is reality” and focuses on explaining knowledge within context(s) (Saunders et al. (2012). In Constructivist interpretivism, meaning is formed through participants and their subjective view and interpretation of the phenomenon is shaped by social interaction. Crotty (1998) however concludes that it is exposed to different people interpreting different meanings to a particular phenomenon.

Axiology is the aspect of research philosophy that deals with the judgements of value and its importance to the credibility of the research results. It relates to the own values of the researcher in the various stages of the research process. Heron (1996) argues that values are the guiding reason of all human action and the axiological skill to articulate values as a basis for making judgements is essential in every research. According to Collis and Hussey, (2003) values could be laden and biased or free and unbiased.

To be value free is when the phenomena studied is treated as an object and the researcher is detached from the research while value laden is when the researcher is a part of the what is being researched and so is subjective.(Saunders et al. 2012).

#### **5.4.2 Research Philosophy in the Context of the Research: Case for Mixed Methods Approach**

From a philosophical perspective, the current study on labour market status of female graduates in Saudi Arabia takes a pragmatic position. In that regard, it assumes the labour market situations of female graduates, the social and authority relations that are based on Sharia and Sunna, and the policy interventions in the forms of Saudisation and Nataqat are perceived as objective realities. However, how these relate to each other and apply to the current labour market situation of female graduates, the researcher takes a subjective view of reality and, therefore, privileges the different perceptions of those whose views inform this research. In any case, as Baumard and Ibert (2001) argue; although “it is conventional in research to make’ this traditional philosophical differences, the distinction ‘is both equivocal and ambiguous’ since none of differentiating ‘criteria allow for an absolute distinction” (p. 77).

As pointed out earlier, philosophically, the researcher takes what Denscombe (2008) calls the “third paradigm”, namely; Mixed-method approach that draws on the relative strengths of the competing traditional paradigms. However, in spite of the strength of the argument for a pragmatic philosophical orientation that uses “the multitrait-multimethod matrix” (Campbell and Fiske, 1959 in Denscombe, 2008, p. 281) and draws on the relative strengths Denscombe, 2008; Cresswell and Plano Clark, 2007, Bryman, 2006), the broad distinction in terms of qualitative and quantitative methodologies that view social research in terms of inductive and deductive distinctions persists.

Research can be approached quantitatively or qualitatively; deductively or inductively, depending on the research purpose and objective as well as philosophical orientation. Traditionally, it is argued that the choice is also informed by the type of research and based on observations about the real world, experience, ideas, theories and models (Saunders et al, 2012).

### **5.5.1 The Inductive and Qualitative Approach**

The inductive approach is linked to the qualitative approach and constructs generalisations out of observations of specific events from singular or particular statements to general or universal propositions. This involves developing theory from observations of empirical reality based on meanings constructed from perceptions of social actors. They further adopt strategies which involve the collection and analysis of non-numeric data to interpret and construct meanings and are subjective as it focuses on values, attitudes and opinions.

These approaches to research are conducted through intense or prolonged study of a problem in real life context and lay emphasis on the process of discovering how the social meaning can be constructed based on the relationship between the researcher and what is researched. These approaches therefore explore a phenomenon with the intention to determine or define the problems and develop theories based on constructs from perceptions of the social factors involved.

The deductive and quantitative approaches are intertwined and are objective processes which focus on the measurement of a phenomenon. They are also the reverse of the inductive and qualitative approaches. These mainly spring from a clear and tentative set of hypotheses, conceptual and theoretical framework which is tested using structured or well-controlled series of empirical observations to collect and analyse numeric data in order to

explain a specific phenomenon or confirm a theory. Hence these approaches argue from a generic statement, applied to a specific context or phenomenon to draw conclusions.

Although an abductive approach has been long in the history of research, it is gaining strength in recent studies. These approaches have evolved from the constraints resulting from the lack of a best suitable single approach to examine, explore or explain relationships among variables in a particular situation. Hence the concept of adductive and mixed method approaches involves the process of moving from theory to data (deductive) and data to theory (inductive) that is, the combination of deductive and inductive approach

Like induction, this approach starts with a real-life observation, however not in all cases as some pre-perceptions and theoretical knowledge may also be initiated. This approach is associated with interpretivism and is the process of describing these activities and meanings and deriving categories and concepts that can form the basis of an understanding or an explanation of the problem at hand and (Blaikie, 2007; Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Liao, 2004). Kovács and Spens' study (2005) highlights that the approach can be used to match a framework or extend it based on new constructs of meanings that apply to the real life situation.

Hence the researcher can introduce a creative element consciously by applying new theory, or a new framework, to already existing phenomena (Kirkeby, 1990 cited in Kovács and Spens, 2005). These approaches produce scientific accounts of social life by drawing on the concepts and meanings used by social actors and the activities in which they engage. It neither follows the pattern of pure deduction nor pure induction. Grounded on this definitions and explanations the concept of abduction in the context of this present study is the approach which combines but quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to achieve and establish a credible conclusion.



An investigation into the existing literature has informed the researchers conceptual understanding of the key issues in the research, as well as the research questions, was taken to real life situation to investigate and gather relevant information based on the perception and values of the key stakeholders and target beneficiaries. However there are some aspect of the research, which sought to also explain if there were any correlations, say, between the challenges Saudi Arabia females face as part of employment practices and the number that actually are employed in the labour market. This feeds into any correlations between the level of education women in Saudi Arabia have achieved, and the relative ease of gaining employment in the labour market. Hence both numeric and non-numeric data, interpretive and statistical responses are needed to aid relevant understanding and explanations from which meanings are constructed and knowledge gained in relation to the research questions, objectives, and aim.

To this effect, this research adopted an adductive approach, which Saunders et al. (2012) explains as a combination of both inductive and deductive approaches, which was necessary to answer the research questions and achieve the stated aims of the study.

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## 5.6 RESEARCH STRATEGY

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Research strategies are general terms, which describe a plan of action, processor design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes. They are adopted in research to inform the methods, techniques, procedures or instruments by which the information will be collected and analyzed. However in this context, the term research strategy will be adopted and used.

Research strategy is an intention that is designed to achieve a long-term or major aim. Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1996), explain that it is the blue print enabling the researcher to arrive at an appropriate solution to the problems that has initiated the research.

It requires a broad overview on the research and supports the type of research to be conducted including the approach adopted to achieve a particular aim. The choice of research strategy should be concerned with what and why certain data need to be collected, when and where the data were collected, and how the data are collected and analyzed. Hence research strategy enables a careful choice of the plan of action for a study and is linked to research approaches and a function of what is to be studied. Based on these various definition, research strategy in this context is defined as the proposed plan by which relevant information to the research are collected and analysed adopting appropriate and effective procedures.

Various types of research strategies include *inter alia*; experiments, survey, case study, action research, grounded theory, ethnography, archival research, narrative enquiry, hermeneutics, feministic, phenomenological and mixed methods. These strategies can be further classified under the headings of quantitative qualitative and mixed methods strategies (see tables 5.2 and 5.3). Furthermore, they argue that no single choice of research strategy can be recommended as best for every study.

TABLE 5.2: RESEARCH STRATEGIES CLASSIFICATIONS BY CONDITIONS

<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Form of research question</b>	<b>Control of behavioural events?</b>	<b>Focuses on contemporary events</b>
Experiment	How, why?	Yes	Yes
Survey	Who, what, where, how many, how much?	No	Yes/No
Archival analysis	Who, what, where, how many, how much?	No	Yes
History	How, why?	No	No
Case study	How, why?	No	Yes

Source: Yin (2009).

TABLE 5.3: RESEARCH STRATEGIES CLASSIFIED BY APPROACHES

<b>Quantitative</b>	<b>Qualitative</b>	<b>Mixed Methods</b>
Experiment	Case study	Convergent
Survey	Action research	Explanatory
	Ethnography	Exploratory
	Grounded theory	Multiphase
	Phenomenology	

Source: Compiled from Creswell (2014), Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011), Denscombe (2010), Collis and Hussey (2003), Remenyi and Sherwood-Smith (1998), Yin (2009).

### **Experiment**

This type of research methodology is applied to explain causal relations between variables. This strategy is usually adopted for research in the natural sciences. It adopts predictions (hypothesis) rather than research questions and a deductive approach to test existing theory to confirm or reject it (Saunders et al. 2012). In social science research the field/Quasi experimental strategy is adopted. This is a form of experiment strategy wherein individuals are not randomly assigned into groups (Creswell, 2014) controlled experimental group(s) in order to measure variables studied to in response based on the manipulations in any of the variables under study. This type of strategy is commonly associated with the deductive/quantitative approach and the positivist theoretical perspective (Holden & Lynch, 2004).

### **Survey**

The Survey strategy is associated with the quantitative and deductive approach however it can be used to support other strategies (Yin 2009; Collis and Hussey, 2003). This strategy is adopted for research where a large amount of data is required to describe and explain the phenomenon under study rather than explore the content of the phenomenon. It seeks to answer questions related to what, where, how much and how many which enables the researcher to collect numeric data.

According to Fowler (2008), survey strategy employs the use of questionnaires or structured interviews with the intent of generalizing from a sample to the entire population. Denscombe (2010) pointed out some main characteristics of the survey strategy.

These include: wide and all inclusive coverage; a cross sectional time horizon to research that allows for information at a specific time and; an empirical research that does not allow for in – depth study of complex or sensitive subjects

There are two main types of survey: descriptive which is characterized by frequency quantities, and analytical which analyzes relationship between variables in a sample group. Denscombe (2010) highlighted the postal, document, internet, telephones, face to face and observational surveys as the different types of research for which Creswell (2014) likened as the different ways of data collection in survey strategy.

### **Case study**

Although the case study strategy is often associated with qualitative and inductive research, it is, in fact, according to Yin (1994, 2003), a research strategy that can involve both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. It involves the empirical investigation into phenomenon as it evolves within a real life context using multiple sources of evidence such as interviews, observation, document, artefacts and questionnaires which form the basis for scientific generalizations (ibid). It also involves the extensive study of a single instance of a phenomenon of interest and is concerned with understanding the dynamics that exists within a specific setting. The case study strategy is mostly adopted in exploratory research even though can be applicable to descriptive, illustrative, experimental and explanatory.

The peculiarity of this strategy is the identification of the case to be studied which can be an individual, an event or entity and usually involves the determination of a unit of analysis which can be holistic when only a unit in the case is studied or an embed when there are other subunits to be studied in addition to the main unit, wherein variables are studied, data is collected and finally analysed.

A case study can be applied to investigate a singular or, as in the case of the current study, examine phenomena across multiple cases. In principle a case study aims at revealing a general problem by studying a particular instance hence could focus on singular instances, but it could also use multi context to assess if there are variability in how relevant variables interact and impact in different social (including organisational) contexts. Case study design, therefore, allows for in-depth study that reveals answers to question about the how, what and why of a phenomenon that would not have been revealed through the consideration of large sample survey (Scapens 1990). In addition this strategy can combine both numeric and non-numeric data in its procedure hence flexible to be adopted in both inductive and deductive research. Although the current study is focused on phenomena and variables in a wider national context of Saudi Arabia, it could be argued that the deliberate choice of specific, but different organisational contexts for data collection represents a strategy to triangulation of data from multi-case sources.

### **Ethnography**

This is a research strategy strongly associated with qualitative research. It has evolved from anthropology, which by concept seeks to study individuals, groups and their culture, lifestyle perceptions and beliefs. Ethnography is a strategy employed to explain the naturalistic social world from the view of those involved (see Fetterman 2010, Wolcott 2008; Parker, 2013). There are however three divisions of ethnography – realistic, interpretivist and critical ethnography (Cunliffe, 2010). Critics however argue that this strategy is exposed to the potential weakness of poor reliability. Denzin and Lincoln (2005 cited in Saunders et al. 2012) assert the problem of representation as one of the shortfalls of the strategy. On his part, Parker (2013) has applied ethnography to critical management studies and the analysis of alternative organisational structures.

This critique, however, ignores what Geertz (1983) calls the nature and purpose of ethnography. He argues that ethnography is not merely a process of research; it is also about what the research does and why she/he does it. The aim of ethnography is to develop theory and therein lies the usefulness of grounded theory to the development of theories to the explanation of social interactions and processes. Though it evolved from the medical field grounded theory is now used in many fields of study and as interpretivist, qualitative paradigm (Collis and Hussey, 2003). As Suddaby (2006) noted, though it is argued to combine the inductive and deductive approach to theory building, grounded theory is generally an interpretive process that require tactic knowledge and feel for data collected (Suddaby, 2006).

Though many advantages are attributed to grounded theory including, like others research strategy, it is also criticised for being empiricist expecting an explanation to exist within the data and adopting field work as its source of theories (ibid). Hence theories that develop are only theoretical and cannot be generalized to the wider population.

### **Archival research**

This strategy employs the use of administrative documents and records as the main source of data for explanatory, descriptive and exploratory research (Yin 2009). Bryman (2008) avers that although archival connotes historical, recent documents can also be studied with the strategy. It further allows for research questions involving history and changes over time to be answered. However the peculiarity of the strategy is that it relies on secondary data and where problems of restricted access or insufficient data arise, it can be a major constraint to the research.

As indicated very early in the chapter, this research used a mixed methods strategy involving various organisational contexts for data sources and triangulation of methods to benefit from what Denscombe describes as the “Communities practice” (2008, p. 270).

The following section will describe and evaluate this strategy in terms of the rationale for its suitability and, therefore, why it is adopted for this study about flexibility and the labour market situation of female graduates in Saudi Arabia. First, the approach is defined and discussed in its various forms, before it is evaluated in terms of its strengths and critiques before a case is made as to why the researcher has adopted it for this research.

The term mixed method according to Denscombe (2010), applies to a research that combines alternative approaches within a single research. In the same vein, its strategy allows for both quantitative and qualitative strategies to be adopted and applied in a single research. This strategy is one which Creswell and Plano-Clark (2007), Greene (2007) Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) amongst others, have in recent years promoted, and view to be credible.

While the meaning of the concept may seem obvious, there are different ways or types in which a mixed method strategy could be presented including: convergent mixed method; explanatory sequential mixed method; exploratory sequential mixed method and; multilevel or multiphase mixed method strategies.

Convergent mixed method strategy is where quantitative data and qualitative data are collected and analysed independently during the same phase of the research process before they are compared or related (merged) to be interpreted. When the collection and analysis of data is initiated by the priority of quantitative data and then uses a qualitative data to support, and interpret the qualitative data, it is referred to as an explanatory sequential mixed method and when initiated from qualitative to quantitative, will represent an exploratory sequential mixed method strategy.

However in more advanced types of mixed method strategy, called the multi-level phase, it may involve an embedded mixed method where the quantitative and qualitative data are embedded within a larger research strategy. It can also be a case where it is derived from a theoretical perspective and adopts quantitative and qualitative methods within the framework referred to as transformative. The multiphase mix method is where there are progressive studies where both qualitative and quantitative approaches are used over time to support, adapt or develop specific programmes.

Although the mixed method strategy is increasingly being argued for, with a dedicated quarterly journal (*Journal of Mixed Methods Research*), some researchers have argued that this strategy is associated with the philosophy guided by the research questions rather than reality. Others have argued that mixed methods can be subsumed in an epistemological philosophy of interpretivism (See Saunders et al. 2012; Creswell & Plano-Clark 2011; Crotty 1998).

While there may be some credibility to these criticisms, there are some very strong arguments for a mixed methods approach for examining and explaining social phenomena. One of the advantages of this strategy is its ability to mix numeric and non-numeric data at different stages of the research process to improve accuracy, and compensates the strength and weakness attached to single approaches. This, Denzin (1970) referred to as triangulation which can overcome the potential criticism of single method strategies. The mixed method under what they termed “methodological choice”, which allows the use of single and multiple data collection techniques and analytical procedures and combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches at different stages of the research process. For example the use of structured questionnaires and observation, in-depth interviews and diary accounts.



Baumard and Ibert (2001) do not only critique social science researcher's obsession with methodological distinctions, they suggest 'multi-method' as the resolution to the dispute on the argument that allows for "exploitation of the complementary nature..." of the traditional competing approaches (p. 77). They go on to point out that multi-method paradigms account for some of most original and credible social research ideas including ideas such as; "triangulation", "purposive non-probability sampling" and others that "reflect the mutually reinforcing qualities of the two paradigms" (pp. 77-78).

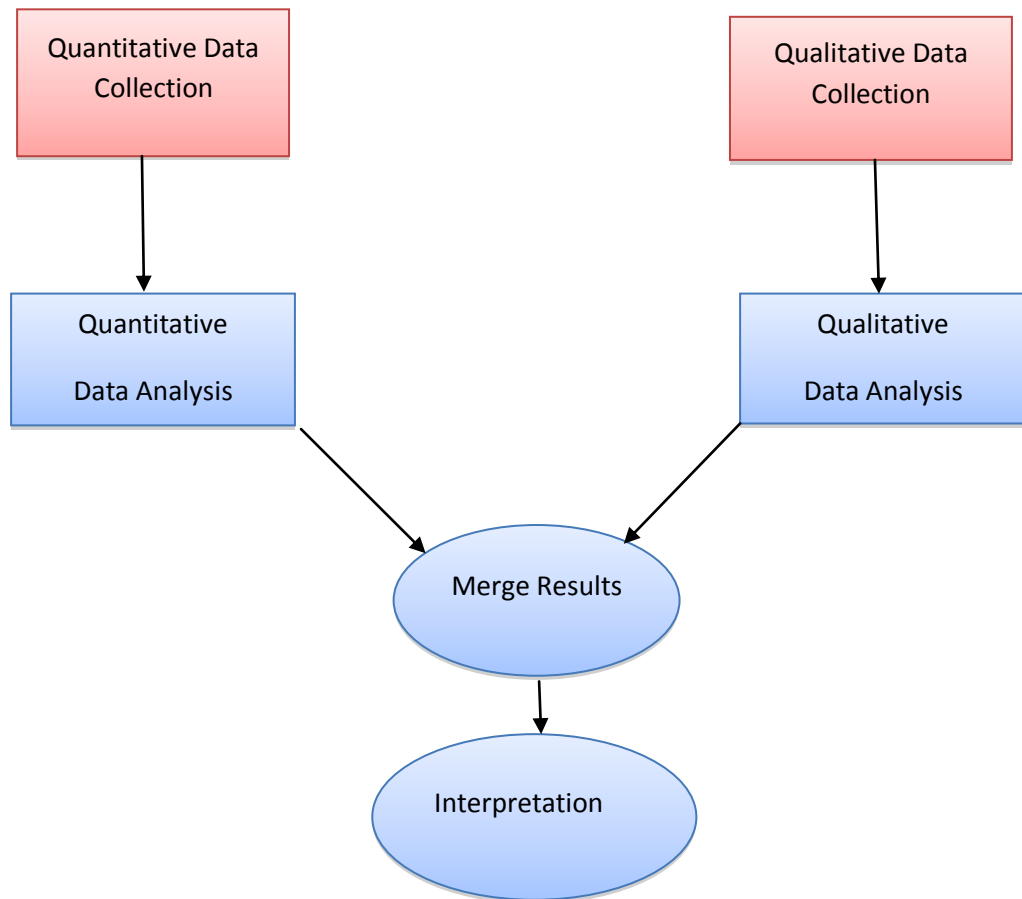
### **Rationale for Choice of Research Strategy in the Current Study**

The rationale for the choice of mixed methods strategy for the current study has been alluded to in the introduction to this chapter. One of the subsequent sections further developed the rationale with the evaluation of different research types and their application to this investigation of the challenges to the employment opportunities of educated women in Saudi Arabia. It follows, therefore, that the descriptive, exploratory, explanatory and, to a lesser extent, predictive nature of this study requires not just soliciting qualitative and quantitative feedback from participants involved in the study, but also examining these responses in the wider social context of Saudi Arabia, but also specific, but different organisational context given the fact that although theocratic nature of the Saudi states influences common cultural and social patterns of social interaction and relationship structures, the literature indicates some differences in HRM practice between public and private sector organisations.

Therefore there is a need to adopt strategies that will allow both qualitative and quantitative data to be generated to validate the framework developed as part of the study, but also that these data be collected from multi data sources to aid in-depth understanding of the complex issues at play. Based on these conditions the convergent mixed method strategy was considered most appropriate for the study.

Furthermore, given that understanding the interaction of variables such as gender relations, educational level, and their implications for employment opportunities requires explanation, grounded theory in the context of multi case sources of data, is a reasonable strategy to adopt. Therefore, in this study, there was need to collect and analyze these data (quantitative and qualitative) independently (see Figure 5.1). This was intended to facilitate effective comparison of the findings from both qualitative and quantitative data sources for a complete understanding of the problems and provide credible and efficient answers to the research questions to achieve the stated aims of the study.

FIGURE 5.1: CONVERGENT MIXED METHOD RESEARCH STRATEGY



Source: Adapted from Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011)

## 5.7 ETHICS, RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Regardless, of methodology or method, every worthwhile research is required to ensure adherence to certain basic standards of ethical conduct and ensure research outcomes and the information that they are based on meet criteria of reliability and validity. While the idea of ethics and ethical conduct may be obvious as depending on the behaviour of the researcher and how they manage their relations with the human elements of the research undertaking (Ellis, 2007), issues of reliability and validity rest on the rigour with which the process and instruments of research are managed (Bell, 2010).

Ethics, in research, especially academic research, is generally focused on doing justice to and playing responsible and fair with research participants and other data sources and, as

such, there is significant focus on confidentiality and informed consent (Bell, 2010; Ellis, 2007). Thus, focus of concern that is central to almost all University ethical code of research, tend to be on what Ellis calls “relational ethics”, which requires “researchers to act from our hearts and minds, acknowledge our interpersonal others, and take responsibility for actions and their consequences” (2007, p. 3). Thus, Aguinis and Henle (2004) note that the objectives of ethical protocols are generally to provide guidelines and mechanisms that will ensure ethical research in terms of issues of confidentiality, anonymity and prevention of any harm. However, in paper on ethics and the “importance of ethical research” for the National Institute of Environmental Health Science, Resnik (2011), stated that the first norm of ethical research is to “promote the aims of research, such as knowledge, truth, and avoidance of error... Prohibitions against fabricating, falsifying, or misrepresenting research data promote the truth and avoid error”.

With these in mind, the current research was subject to ethical scrutiny in accordance with the University of Wolverhampton guidelines for conducting research, which, among other things, require that “Staff and research students registered for an MPhil or PhD not undertake survey work, make enquiries, conduct interviews or administer questionnaires without prior consultation with the SRC through the Research Degrees and Ethics Subcommittee”. In addition, it also requires for research that “involve human subjects directly” the research instrument, which in case of this study is questionnaire, along with “a description of the target group/population, and a rationale for the methodology, must be appended to the proposal form” for consideration and approval by the Ethics panel of the relevant Research Committee before data collect of any sort or extent is undertaken.

For purposes of informed consent, even though questionnaires were communicated via online applications, detailed information sheets accompanied the questionnaire where confidentiality was guaranteed. Thus participants were given the opportunity to make informed decisions as to whether to participate or not.

In terms of voluntary participation, although specific organisations were targeted, having had accessed to central data, the research did not require gatekeeper permission or collaboration that might involve any form of force being applied on individuals to take part in the study. For ethical and confidentiality purposes, the companies to which participants belong to will not be named, but described as company A, B and C. They will be presented in tables with their respective letter within the findings chapters.

Access and use of public database as a means of accessing participants has the limitation of lacking the researcher/participant relationship that is often so important in phenomenological research, where the getting story of the participants and particularly their subjective meanings of what they say and how they behave, are central to the research purpose (Hermmersly, 2005 in Denzin, 2006). However, the remote access and recruitment of participants through a public database also has the advantage of much more reliability given that no undue influence is exerted either by a controlling gatekeeper or, the researcher. With respect to the crucial issue of validity, meaning ensuring that the research instrument is consistent with the information that is intended to generate (Sapsford and Jupp, 1998), the questionnaire was subjected to rigorous review by my supervisor, whose experience in these matter is unquestionable and, in addition, the questions were translated from English to Arabic and tested with the help of colleagues including native Arab speakers.

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## 5.8 RESEARCH METHODS

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Research methods, are the techniques or procedures used to collect and analyse the data with the purpose of answering the research questions or hypothesis. It is the quantitative standardized instruments and qualitative theme analysis of data in text format which are used to collect and analyze data. Methods are rather detailed in the choices to be employed which have been informed by the strategy adopted. For example, it is just an interview or participant observation rather than what type of interview or kind of observation.

Qualitative research methods are subjective and involve the collection and analysis of data based on the perception of the respondents and further seeks to gather in-depth understanding into the study (Ghauri et al. 1995). Van Maanen (1983 p.9 in Collis and Hussey 2003) outline an “.....array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning and not the frequency of more or less naturally occurring phenomena the social world”.

Quantitative research methods on the other hand emphasise on objective measurements and numerical analysis of data collected through statistical means - polls, questionnaires or surveys (Babbie 2010). Data can be sourced from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources refer to those that are directly collected at field source while secondary data are those data collected from literature audio or video documents such as textbooks, journals, archives, annual reports, government published data and films. Data can also be classified as either qualitative or quantitative. Quantitative data includes those data that are termed numeric or countable data while the qualitative data are non-numeric data.

There are various methods as posited by many research scholars of collecting data which include *inter alia* questionnaires, interviews, protocol analysis, observations, diaries, and critical incident.

### **5.8.1 Methods of data collection**

- **Quantitative data collection:** Questionnaires are the common method of quantitative data collection in social research. It is a general term which includes all the methods of collecting data wherein a set of questions are asked to all within the sample group and the respondents are expected to provide answers in such predetermined order. They include structured interviews, telephone and online questionnaires. Questionnaires are employed to reach a large volume of

respondents in many locations and could contain both open and closed ended questions. Questionnaires can be administered via post, telephones, face to face, individual and group and has the advantage to gather a large volume of information on a study at less time and cost.

- **Qualitative data collection:** Qualitative data collection is the process of obtaining and recording data through direct observations and semi-structured in-depth and grouped interviews. This method enables in-depth information to be gathered on the study but may require more time and cost than those from the questionnaire.

### **(I.) Observations**

This is a process of collecting data whereby the researcher becomes involved by action which could be revealed or concealed in an environment of other people and responds to the way in which the work in such environment is undertaken. Observation could be participant when it is used to discover “meanings people attach to their actions” or structured when it is concerned with recording the frequency at which those actions are performed.

### **(II.) Interviews**

Research interviews are purposeful conversations between two or more persons in which one referred to as the interviewer asks clear and concise questions while the other(s) referred to as the interviewee(s) attentively and willingly responds to such questions asked. Interviews are classified as structured, semi-structured or unstructured and could take the form of one to one, groups or focus groups or via the internet. They include:

- (A.) Structured interviews can be likened to questionnaire in which the researcher administers a set of predetermined questions face to face with the various selected respondent(s). They are used to collect large volume of quantifiable data from a wide range of respondents.

- (B.) Semi-structured interviews are those interviews in which a list of themes linked to the research questions and possible important questions are asked and are likely applicable to qualitative research interviews. However the answers are opened to allow for the interviewee to elaborate on the points
- (C.) Unstructured interviews are used to explore in-depth general idea of interest. There is no restrict in the interview and as a result the interviewee is free to talk freely in relation to the topic area. In other cases, the interviewer may direct the focus of the interview.

Analyzing data will depend on type of data collected - numeric or non-numeric. There are different methods by which data collected can be analyzed.

#### **5.8.2 Methods of data analysis**

- **Quantitative method of data analysis:** Numeric data which usually relate to quantitative data, engage statistical procedures for analysis which include descriptive and inferential analysis which is used to draw conclusion about a complete population. Descriptive analysis is based on the measure of central tendency, spread of data- standard deviations, while the Group comparisons look for patterns and relationship in the data. Common types are chi -square test, T test, and analysis of variance.
- **Qualitative method of data analysis:** Qualitative data, usually relate to qualitative data analytical procedures include content analysis, thematic analysis, comparative analysis, discourse analysis and grounded theory.
  - i. Content analysis: this involves systematic assignment of code by content based on numbers or words to specific characteristics as used in the text. It is mostly adopted in open ended questions and enables the answers to be quantifiable.



- ii. Thematic analysis is a highly inductive analytical approach whereby themes emerge from the data collected and not imposed by the researcher.
- iii. Comparative analysis is also closely connected to the thematic analysis however in these case data from different people are contrasted until no further or new issue arise.
- iv. Discourse analysis also referred to as conversational analysis which is based on speech- how people talk what has made them talk. Speech is analyzed as performance rather than the state of the mind.
- v. Grounded theory analytical procedures involve the coding and categorization of data collected with the aim of deriving concepts and theories from meanings within a data.

To answer the research questions, hypotheses and achieve the stated aims and objectives of this study, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analysed. This has been informed from the choice of the convergent mixed method research strategy. The quantitative data were collected via questionnaires while the qualitative data via semi-structured interviews. This is to facilitate reliability, viability and credibility of results and conclusions that will be generated from the study.

### **5.8.3 Sampling procedures**

To discuss and obtain feedback or answers to the research questions and hypothesis, the researcher must engage in a sampling strategy and procedure, which include determining the location, participants, sample size and recruitment procedures for the participants (Creswell and Plano-Clark 2011). This is applicable to collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. Sampling procedures require the determination of a sample population and selection of a sample size (Saunders *et al.*, 2012; Creswell, 2014), which can be carried out in two ways to determine the appropriate number of participants and how they will be

recruited to be involved in the study. Sampling procedures can be carried out employing probability and non-probability approaches.

### **Probability sampling**

Probability sampling is an approach wherein the target samples are selected through a process that gives an equal chance of selection to all the individuals in the sample population. It relies on the statistical theory associated with the normal distribution of events which supports the best practice of obtaining a “representative sample” where large sample populations are required for the study. Sampling techniques include the random, systematic, cluster and multi-stage and the stratified sampling techniques (Creswell 2014; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011; Denscombe, 2010).

### **Non probability sampling**

This type of sampling approach does not rely on the statistical theory or operate on the principle of random selection to obtain target samples but rather on the basis of pure chance. It is applied where smaller sample population is required for the study and used as an explanatory rather than a representative sample. The quota, purposive, theoretical, snowball and convenience sampling are the various techniques of non-probability sampling (Denscombe, 2010; Creswell and Plano Clark 2011; Saunders et al 2012).

### **Sampling approach for this research**

For the purpose of this research, a probability sampling technique (stratified sampling technique) was used for the quantitative data and non-probability sampling techniques (quota and purposive sampling) were used for the qualitative data; to ensure that the sample population was determined within the scope of the study and from the sample frame. The sample frame was determined from the categories of participant who were expected to participate in the study.

- **Questionnaire sampling:** To form the basis for collecting both qualitative and quantitative data needed to construct credible meanings and knowledge, the researcher aimed at a large scale sample for the quantitative data collection. Therefore, it was decided that for each company, 500 participants would be selected among educated Saudi female employees, while 1000 participants in local government and 1000 unemployed educated Saudi females would be surveyed. It was discussed previously that due to segregation rules in place in the KSA, the researcher had to meet senior executives in each company to ensure the dispatch of the questionnaire to the sample. Company A agreed to the sample size of 500 participants, while company B agreed to 370, and 436 for company C. The reduction of the sample size in companies B and C was due to a lower level of available relevant participants, which could be explained by a lower level of educated Saudi females employed within these companies. The Ministry of Civil Service randomly sent out the questionnaire to 1000 relevant participants. The 1000 unemployed Saudi Arabian educated women were selected from the Hafaz database, 2013, from the Ministry of Labour, Saudi Arabia.

The selected sample size from the population was stratified into sub-groups; Company A, Company B, Company C, Local government, and Unemployed.

- **Semi-structured Interview sampling:** The data were collected from respondents who represent policy decision makers and/or supporters in companies and at government level, as well as unemployed, educated Saudi women. A total number of twenty-eight semi-structured interviewees were conducted in the study. Table 6.2.2 in the chapter on data analysis provides more detailed backgrounds of participants.
- **Questionnaire sampling for framework validation:** following the data analysis and the development of the framework, 10 participants were selected from the semi-structured interview sample on the criteria that they were influential policy makers in their position. A structured questionnaire and the framework were distributed to them

by email for them to review prior to interview. A 15 to 25-minute face to face interview took place with each male respondent in May 2015, which was audio taped after agreement, transcribed in Arabic and then translated into English. Female respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire online. Similar methods to semi-structured interview data analysis were used.

#### **5.8.4 Distribution and data collection**

Having obtained the relevant data base, the online survey software SurveyMonkey, one of the most popular “internet research protocols” (Buchanan and Hvizdak, 2009, p. 37) was used to access the 3,306 participants from the five difference categories of data sources (see table 5.4). As with the rationale for choice of research strategy and methods, the choice of on-line survey application is dictated by the fact that it does not necessarily undermine the theoretical credibility of research, but, perhaps, the most crucial reason is that it a cost effective method of collecting data from a large sample source including (and this is critical), potential female informants who, by virtue of Saudi law and traditional, cannot be accessed directly.

However, online research protocols are not without problems, not the least of which, is the matter of ethics (Buchanan and Hvizdak, 2009), but as according to Murthy (2013), there are also problems of access to such technology for both researchers and respondents. In a survey of 750 University ethics board, Buchannan and Hvizdak found that while 94% respondent tout the efficiency of online survey applications, the same respondents also expressed concerns about the challenges they pose to “traditional research ethics principles such as consent, risk, privacy, anonymity, confidentiality, and autonomy, and adds new methodological complexities surrounding data storage, security, sampling, and survey design” (2009, p. 37).

Murthy, while acknowledging the potential of online methods, lament the lack of equal access to the relevant technology arguing that, “access to these technologies remains stratified by class, race, and gender of both researchers and respondents” (2013, p. 23). The current study is aware of such concerns, but on the assumption that access to relevant technology is not really a problem in Saudi Arabia and the fact that the ethical concerns are addressed by the research protocols that govern the relevant institutions, the method of data collection presented the most efficient and likely way of accessing the most critical participant cohort, which is unemployed female graduates in Saudi Arabia.

TABLE 5.4: QUESTIONNAIRE DISTRIBUTION AND COMPLETION

<b>Questionnaire Group Panel</b>	<b>Dispatched</b>	<b>Answered</b>	<b>Valid (%)</b>
Company A	500	237	195 (39%)
Company B	370	189	158 (42.7%)
Company C	436	212	183 (42%)
Local Government	1000	426	323 (32.3%)
Unemployed	1000	631	490 (49%)
Total	3,306	1695	1349 (40.8%)

From the 3,306 questionnaires sent/dispatched, 1,695 questionnaires were returned. In the end, the number of usable questionnaire received for the study was 1349 (a response rate of 40.80%). It was necessary to collect the views of a number of people. After data was collected, the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS – Version 20) was employed to analyse quantitative data. The descriptive and inferential statistical procedures were used to analyze the quantitative data while the qualitative data were analyzed using comparative analysis.

The findings are presented in the two chapters which follow. However, before moving onto the empirical findings, some personal reflection on the research experience is presented as a basis for the future direction of research.

#### 5.9 REFLECTION ON FIELD EXPERIENCE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

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Theoretically, this study is motivated by a keen interest in the field of HRM, which led to the researcher undertaking a master's degree programme prior to undertaking a PhD journey. Crucially, however, the immediate motivation for the general area and topic of choice is driven by the fact that the researcher is a citizen of Saudi Arabia, with some keen interest in future developments in HRM in Saudi Arabia bearing in mind the evident trends in demographics regarding education and profession development in Saudi Arabia.

As a result, he undertook the research with some tacit knowledge of some of the phenomena and the social context in which relevant variables emerge and evolve. As a Saudi Arabian man exploring phenomena which concern the opposite gender in Saudi Arabia, meant anticipating that the fieldwork would require navigation of some sociocultural issues around gender separation and the implications this could have in terms of access to the core participant cohort, female graduates. The ethical requirements of the research institution to which he belongs envisaged and attempted to address contextually neutral issues and concerns about confidentiality, anonymity, fairness and the security of research participants and the researcher. However, the institution's protocol regarding research ethics are also informed by British and, therefore, Western standards and concerns about ethics and norms of behaviour and practice. Consequently, they provide no guidelines regarding conduct in the unique social context of Saudi Arabia.

Despite being a Saudi citizen, with tacit knowledge of rules regarding gender relations in Saudi Arabia, the researcher did not give careful thought to the potential problems that he might confront as a male attempting to research the employment concerns of females.

He had given some consideration to the administration of the survey questionnaire, with the choice of online methods (survey monkey). However, although he argued the importance of accessing more in-depth and antecedent information about the phenomenon of research, the practical issues around interviewing female participants were not given the serious thought they deserved. In that regard, the researcher was at fault.

Having arrived in Saudi Arabia and suddenly waking up to the fact that I was confronted with a major social challenge with significant implications for the research outcome, I had to do some serious and quick thinking about how to overcome this hurdle. The issue was the subject of some intense and lengthy discussions with friends, colleagues and, especially, family.

Finally, following rules around gender separation, we came to the conclusion that my sister would accompany me and sit in through all the interviews with female participants, and that such interviews would comply with strict time limitations (see section on interviews for time allowed for each interview).

While these preparations had provided an acceptable and reasonable solution to the matter of accessing a core participant cohort, one cannot ignore the potential implications which this could have for the reliability of the findings. The question of the implications of a male researcher interviewing female participants in a social context that would not ordinarily allow such interaction has potential implications for the outcome. It therefore begs the question of whether participant responses would have varied if the interviewer were a female. It follows, therefore, that in future research of the same phenomenon, involving a mixed gender research team could be a credible proposition with the potential to unravel more detailed and nuanced outcomes, with far more significant theoretical and policy implications.

TABLE 5.5: SUMMARY OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ADOPTED FOR THE STUDY

<b>Research Methodology</b>	<b>Types</b>		<b>Suitability and Adoption</b>
Philosophy	Epistemology		Constructive-Interpretivism
	Ontology		Lean towards Subjectivism
	Axiology		Leaning towards Value Laden
Theoretical Perspective			Interpretivist
Approach			Abductive
Strategy	Mixed Method		Convergent Mixed Method
Method of data collection	Sources of data collection	Primary sources of data	Questionnaires Semi structured interviews
		Secondary sources of Data	Government publication Literature from journals, Conferences, Reports from consultants (i.e KPMG), Books
	Sampling technique	Probability and Non probability sampling	Stratified sampling, Quota and purposive sampling
Method of Data Analysis			i. Inferential and descriptive analysis ii. Comparative analysis



This chapter explored relevant literature and debates about social research in order to contextualise and argue for the methodological (design and methods) chosen for this study of the potential of flexibility and flexible employment practices as solution for the labour market problems of female graduates in Saudi Arabia. Accordingly, the chapter engaged with the traditional philosophical debate at the heart of social research by respectively describing and evaluating competing views regarding, for example; inductive and deductive and, quantitative and qualitative research. Following from that and taking the position that the criteria of distinction between two do not permit f an absolute distinction, the discussions shifted to evaluations and applications of different research types to the current study. Accordingly, the researcher argues that the research, in terms of the aims and objectives of understanding the various variables, in their own rights and their relationships to each other and to the implications that they (individually and collective) have for the labour markets problems of female Saudi graduates and, the solutions to those problems, fits, to varying degrees, with all the research types (namely: descriptive, exploratory, explanatory and predictive).

As a result of taking that position, the chapter argues for an alternative, third paradigm, mixed-methods approach. The rationale for this is not simply to dismiss the significance of the distinguishing criteria of traditional philosophical positions about social research, but rather, devise a research designs that benefits from their complementary strengths and manages their respective weaknesses. Consequently, the chapter presented and evaluated a design that involve collecting data from multiple sources of four organisational settings representing exclusively private and public sector organisations as well as public/private enterprise. In addition, and using a publicly accessible government managed database, data was sought from unemployed participants as well.

Pragmatic philosophical orientation about social research does not, however, preclude paying attention to fundamental research criteria in the forms of ethics, validity and reliability of the process and outcomes. According, the chapter reflected how ethical issues were managed with due diligence, by following the University protocols and reflecting on the nature of the data sources and their implications for the reliability of the research. In that regard, the researcher argues that, with respect to reliability, given that the database and therefore, participant are not under the influence of, or controlled by any gatekeeper, participants cannot be unduly influenced to participate and give information that they wouldn't give under similar conditions. On the issue of validity, the rigor that was applied to development and review of the research instrument is represented as sufficient to ensure the validity of the data. The chapter is then devoted to discussions and presentation of how data was collected and the description of the sources of data, both in terms of organisational context and, participant profile.

The final sections of the chapter reflected on the peculiar aspect of the field experience, bearing in mind the core research aims and objectives. Accordingly, it raised concerns about the inadequacy of institutional protocols on research ethics for the Saudi context and outlined the decisions and solutions that were taken to address this gap. While acknowledging the relative credibility of the solution in terms of access to female interviewees, the implications of these solutions for the reliability of the interviewing findings relating to female participant is also acknowledged. In that regard, it is suggested that future research should consider a mixed gender team.

Notwithstanding this potential limitation, it is the argument of this thesis that sufficiently relevant data has been collected to drive conclusions which shed light on the phenomenon of research and, by extension, have implications for all relevant stakeholders; policy makers, employers, employees, but particularly female graduates seeking to enter, remain and chart successful careers in the Saudi labour market. The next chapter focuses on the analysis and presentation of data.

## CHAPTER 6 : FINDINGS ON THE LABOUR MARKET

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### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

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As set out previously, the aim of the current study is to explore the potential for flexible employment policies and practices as a solution to the labour market problems and unemployment among female graduates in Saudi Arabia. Accordingly, the theory chapters (Chapters 3 and 4) reviewed and analysed the literature about the labour market, flexibility and flexible employment in the context of HRM and, crucially, discussions and assessments of existing policy interventions in the form of indigenization (Saudisation) to address the employment situation of Saudi citizens in general, but particularly female graduates. The essence of the current chapter, therefore, is to present and analyse the data obtained from the quantitative and qualitative approaches undertaken to provide empirical evidence as a basis for a critique of existing literature, policies, and practices. Data was obtained by survey from Saudi female graduates employed across a range of organisation types as well as from unemployed individuals. This is complemented by interviews with representatives of those groups and other relevant parties, and the data from both survey questionnaire and interviews will form the basis of the chapter, organised on the structure of the questionnaire.

This empirical chapter draws on data which is collected from, among others, female graduates, senior managers and ordinary employees from different organisational and institutional settings, to describe and discuss the research issues. The chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section presents the demographic profile of the data sources. The second section, which is further divided into three sections, documents issues relating to the labour market. In that respect, section 6.3.1 covers labour market policy reporting on the nature and views on Saudi labour market policy in relation to effectiveness as redress for the labour market situation of female graduates.

Section 6.3.2 presents analyses and discusses research participants' expectations of the impact of labour policy. In that regard, the findings cover views of participants who, respectively, represent the views of government, employers and female graduates. Finally, Section 6.3.3 focuses on and discusses data on women's labour market and job seeking strategy and behaviour. In that regard, and in light of the aims of the study as to whether flexible employment practices represent a viable solution for female graduate unemployment, the chapter discusses views on various forms of flexible employment and whether female graduates consider flexible employment as a means of labour market entry. The presentations and discussions of women's labour market entry and job seeking behaviours do not, however, include information about gender differences in response to these issues. Instead, gender differences in employment opportunities are discussed in Chapter 7.

Accordingly, the findings for this chapter will be presented under the three themes presented in Chapter Three: policy; expectation from the government; and women's avenues to find jobs. The data obtained through the quantitative survey undertaken as well as the qualitative datasets obtained through interviews will be presented and discussed. Datasets obtained from both approaches are triangulated, presented and analysed, and inferences are drawn from the findings obtained. It is hoped that this will help address the key objectives of the study, which were set out in Chapter One, and relate to the examination of employment policy concerns and challenges of government, employers and employees in Saudi Arabia, especially with regard to educated women. Also, the chapter will investigate the extent to which education, training, and key human resources issues impact on the employability of female graduates in Saudi Arabia. In addition, it explores the nature of flexible forms of employment in Saudi Arabia, and how this is considered by employers and employees, and especially in terms of the employment of educated Saudi females.

It follows, therefore, that the implications of the findings for policy either at national, organisational or individual levels, are either explicitly, but often implicitly, inferred in the description and/or analysis of the findings. For example, the near consensus among female graduates on willingness to enter into flexible employment as a pathway to labour market entry provides empirical evidence that could be a basis for labour market policy at the national level and recruitment practices at the organisational level. Similarly, the findings relating to labour market categories that are more open to female employment have implications for the educational and professional decisions of female students.

In structuring this chapter, firstly, data is presented regarding those who participated in the questionnaire survey and interviews for the study. The backgrounds of the participants are noted and reasons for targeting the participants are proffered. Data on the questions posed to study participants, together with their views on those questions, are presented and relevant analysis of the data is provided. In doing this, reference is made to the research objectives, research questions and hypotheses which are documented in Chapter One and addressed in this chapter. Where appropriate in this chapter the application of appropriate data analysis techniques (quantitative and qualitative) for data interrogation is made. It is, however, important to re-state, as was noted in the last chapter, that the analysis of qualitative data was achieved through content analysis. This is a generally used technique for data analysis. It is equally the case that current applications of content analysis show that there are three distinct approaches to content analysis, which are conventional, directed, or summative.

In the current study, the summative approach was employed. The summative content analysis involved counting and comparison, usually of keywords or content, followed by interpretation of the underlying context. For the quantitative data analysis, the SPSS 20 was used and the techniques employed included correlation, and the Kruskal Wallis test.

This test is used to determine whether a variable such as, for example, the gender of participants can be seen as having a statistically significant influence in terms of the answers given by respondents to a particular question, as shown by the p-value calculated. This helps to show whether that variable is lined to a meaningful difference in the answer which is given for a question. The Kruskal Wallis test is particularly useful where there are more than two categories of group within a variable, such as in the case of highest qualification obtained, where several options may be put forward for response. The data thus treated is displayed in tabular form and its salient features discussed.

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## 6.2 DEMOGRAPHICS

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Prior to presenting the findings along the lines of the themes outlined above, the size and characteristics of the data source are presented. Initially, the size is broken down based on the three business public organisations (company A, company B and company C). These organisations are targeted on the basis that they represent three forms of ownership (public, private and multinational) and therefore allow for triangulation between different data sources. Company A is an entirely publicly owned enterprise which is responsible for the exploration and management of Saudi Arabia's oil and gas reserves. Accordingly, it is arguably the single largest employer organisation and accounts for the vast majority of the Kingdom's revenue. Company C, on the other hand is a totality private multinational bank owned by HSBC and private Saudi investors, and company B is a Saudi private commercial bank.

In addition, and to allow for greater variation, triangulation and, therefore, reliability, the local government sector and unemployed are also targeted for their views on flexibility and labour market situation of female Saudi graduates. To further ensure a good level of reliability and contrast, the findings described and analysed draw on information from a range of varied characteristics in terms of gender, position and employment/unemployment

status. The participating organisations in the questionnaire survey and the number of participants from these organisations are documented in Table 6.2.1.

In all, 1,349 individuals took part in the questionnaire survey. The participants belonged to five different organisations/employee groups: Company A, Company B, Company C, Local Government, and the ‘unemployed’ group. It was important to get the views of a large varied panel. The reasons for selecting these organizations were that, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, these are some of the main employers in Saudi Arabia, and they reflect public, private, MNC and local authority employers.

TABLE 6.2.1: PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

<b>Variable Group</b>	<b>Frequency (valid)</b>	<b>% (Valid)</b>
Company A	195	14.5
Company B	158	11.7
Company C	183	13.6
Local Government	323	23.9
Unemployed	490	36.3
Total	1349	100

With regard to the semi-structured interviews, twenty-eight people were selected to be interviewed. The interviewees, as shown in Table 6.2.2, came from a host of areas, including government, organisations, Council of Saudi Chambers, and unemployed group. This was important to have multiple views. In the following tables the company will be defined by their respective letter (A, B or C).

TABLE 6.2.2: A LIST OF INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Interview number	Position	Place of Work	Gender	Place of study
1	Minister	Ministry of Higher Education	Male	KSA
2	Minister	Ministry of Labour	Male	KSA
3	Head of HR Business Partnership	B	Female	Abroad UK
4	Vice president of employment service	B	Male	KSA
5	HR Manager	B	Male	KSA
6	Head of personnel	B	Male	Abroad USA
7	Unemployed	N/A	Female	KSA
8	Unemployed	N/A	Female	KSA
9	Unemployed	N/A	Female	KSA
10	HR Officer	A	Female	KSA
11	HR Officer	A	Female	KSA
12	HR Officer	A	Female	Worked in UK
13	HR Officer	A	Female	Abroad USA and UK
14	Planning and Program Analyst	A	Female	KSA
15	Career Counsellor	A	Female	Abroad USA
16	HR Analyst	A	Female	Abroad USA
17	career counsellor	A	Female	eLearning Foreign university
18	Head of Division	A	Female	KSA
19	HR Analyst and Change Management Consultant	A	Female	Abroad UK (Male is foreigner)
20	HR analyst	A	Female	Abroad UK
21	HR Analyst	A	Female	Abroad USA
22	HR Analyst	A	Female	KSA and USA
23	HR Analyst	A	Female	UK (Foreigner)
24	Head of Resourcing	C	Male	KSA
25	HR Officer	C	Female	KSA
26	Head of Contact Centres & Customer Care	C	Male	KSA
27	a freelance consultant and full time PhD student	Council of Saudi Chambers	Female	Abroad USA
28	General Manager- for Ladies Training and Recruitment	Council of Saudi Chambers - Asr Al-Areeba	Female	Abroad Switzerland



The Company A is a public organization involved in oil and gas exploration, manufacturing and marketing activities. Company A is the official government organisation mandated to do such business, and therefore is fully owned as such.

The company has grown over the years and currently boasts over 54,000 employees, which gives Company A a significant role in the Saudi Arabian GDP.

The Saudi government depends on Company A for revenue earnings to be able to offer services and governance to the entire Kingdom. Nevertheless, the state owned enterprise has a well-structured management system where the government allows internal autonomy for the managers while drawing the earnings to facilitate its daily needs (Saudi ARAMCO, 2013).

The company identifies five core corporate values that underpin its activity: Excellence, Safety, Integrity, Citizenship and Accountability. As they claim to live according to these values, they believe that these should not only be reflected in their employees but also enforced by the employees' general and business conduct (Saudi ARAMCO, 2015).

As a state owned company, it seems only natural that Company A would also assume responsibility in relationship to its country; and therefore it is no surprise that it defines itself as a "good corporate citizen" who is willing to demonstrate social responsibility, support for its community and the responsibility to act as a role model for building solid relationships both with partners and customers.

Within the definitions of the five core corporate values, a tendency to dissociate between those that are meant to underpin the company's actions and those that should be reflected in the employees' conduct can be noticed. In that regard, the company engages itself to contributing to the well-being of its workforce but the employees are also expected to take responsibility for their actions in meeting corporate objectives (Saudi Aramco, 2015).

Company C is a multinational organization which is a joint venture between local investors and HSBC group. Company C has networks of banks in Saudi as well as London in the UK. Company C is listed in the Saudi Stock Exchange. Company C currently has a workforce of about 5,000. Among the services provided by the bank are both conventional and Islamic banking activities. The conventional banking activities are further segmented into private, commercial and investment banking.

On the other hand, Islamic banking adheres to the Sharia Law of financial management. Due to the public listing of company C, the management structures and styles follow some regulations and laws different from the fully government owned cases (SABB, 2013).

In order to better understand the company's perspective on its relationship with its employees, it is relevant to look at its HR policies. The company's website presents some of the main ideas and practices that shape this relationship with its employees. They declare their intention to provide the best possible working environment, one that should help it acquire the highest calibre of staff. The working environment which they intend to create should be attractive and challenging, but also motivating, so as to help the company to attract, develop, motivate and retain the desired staff. It can also be observed that the working environment is defined with reference to the level of compensation and investments made to provide high quality training. An important and very relevant aspect of their intention as a multinational company is to increase the number of Saudi nationals among company C's employees (SABB, 2015).

The Company B Bank is, arguably, one of the largest commercial banks in the Arabian region by asset values. The Company B Bank was an active contributor in the formation of the Islamic banking concept including providing financial assistance.

Company B Bank is among the pioneer commercial banks in Saudi Arabia; hence, it has gathered great financial influence in the region. From 1999 onward, the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Finance Public Investment Fund has been a majority stakeholder in this Bank.

To date, the Company B Bank has over 2.3 million customers served from 284 branches within the Kingdom alone. On its website, Company B describes itself as the leading bank contributing to social responsibility. It therefore emphasises its efforts to serve the community in health, education and social sectors and to develop partnerships with other private or state companies towards the sustainable development of the community.

There are four programmes listed under the bank's Corporate Responsibility: Orphans Programme, Entrepreneurs Programme, Productive Families Programme and Voluntary Work Programme. However, these programmes are discussed in generic terms and, as a result none of the component parts are distinguishable and neither employees' nor departments' responsibilities are clear.

Given the nature of the study, it was also important to explore the views of the unemployed. The latter represented 36.5% of those who participated in the study. Moreover, some of those who participated in the survey as representatives of the unemployed group are also able to provide relevant insight into the Saudi workforce market as former employees. The experience of all those in this group is relevant, irrespective of whether they are former employees or graduates looking for their first job, as all accounts relate to types of experience that are symptomatic for the context under scrutiny. Obtaining data from a wide range of employer groupings enriches the study's findings and provides opportunities for comparative analysis.

Following the presentation of the panel grouping in terms of organisational and general characteristics, the researcher will depict the panel's age distribution.

### **Age**

A further analysis of participants for the questionnaire, as shown in Table 6.2.3, indicates that the majority (58.8%) of participants were between 25 and 34 years of age.

TABLE 6.2.3: AGE OF PARTICIPANTS TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY – AGGREGATE LEVEL

Variable Group	Frequency (valid)	% (Valid)
18-24	247	18.3
25-34	793	58.8
35-44	268	19.9
45-60	41	3.0

It was important to ascertain the ages of respondents for a number of reasons. The question regarding the age of the respondents was asked to establish the demographic that is working (and more interested in working) at the respective organisations surveyed. Additionally, knowledge of the age of the respondents is useful to determine whether the organisations have a preference for certain age groups during their recruitment and perhaps retention strategies.

TABLE 6.2.4: AGE OF PARTICIPANTS TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY – DIS-AGGREGATE LEVELS

age range	Group panel					Frequency (Valid)	% (Valid)
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed		
18-24	32	5	19	52	139	247	18.3
25-34	90	110	122	198	273	793	58.8
34-44	50	31	36	73	78	268	19.9
45—60	23	12	6	0	0	41	3.0
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100

A further observation on age reveals that nearly 20% are between 35 and 44 years of age. Only about 18% are aged between 18 and 24 years of age. Interestingly, only 3% are between 45 and 60 years of age. Put differently, 97% of those who participated in the survey were less than 45 years old. This shows that the workforce is relatively young.

From a closer and more detailed level of inspection of the data across the five (5) groupings/organisations (company A, company B, company C, Local Government, and ‘unemployed’) the data revealed that none of the participants from two of the five panels –

i.e. the local authority and unemployed, fall within the 45-60 year age group. On the other hand, most of the participants within the within the 18 – 24 year age range, about 56% of that cohort, are within the unemployed category. Also, a significant number of participants within the 25 to 34 year category are unemployed. It would therefore seem that the majority of those in the “unemployed group” are aged between 18 and 34 years.

## Qualifications

The study attempted to gauge where the participants had achieved their qualifications, and in what subject area or discipline. The respondents’ qualifications were gleaned from the survey, and it was useful to ascertain the level of qualifications of those employed. They are also an important issue in determining whether they are “locking-out” people from jobs and favouring others. Qualifications are also important to show trends that certain organizations are leaning towards or even the standards set for service excellence. A qualification is a competitive benchmark which, arguably, guides the potential job seekers to aspire and improve their chances of absorption into available vacancies. Qualifications are used by the human resources department of every organization to benchmark wages and remunerate skills.

Of those who participated in the questionnaire, 17.7% had a Master’s degree and 78.7% had a Bachelor’s degree. This indicates that about 96% of respondents are degree holders. Qualifications are spread across participating organisations in Table 6.2.5.

TABLE 6.2.5: LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Level of degree	Group panel					Frequency (Valid)	% (Valid)
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed		
High school	0	0	0	8	0	8	.6
Diploma	0	0	0	40	0	40	3.0
Bachelor	123	87	144	265	443	1062	78.7
Master	72	71	39	10	47	239	17.7
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100

As indicated from the data displayed in Table 6.2.5., most of the survey participants in all five groups analysed have a Bachelor's degree. However, company A and company B have the highest number of employees who have obtained a Master's degree (company A – 72, company B - 71).

This can be interpreted as reflecting the companies' already expressed exigency, an exigency oriented towards the services they provide and, therefore, concern that the employees they engage have high standards of educational and professional qualification. The Local Government displays the most diverse panel of employees, being the only group which has representatives for all four levels of degree considered; high-school (8), diploma (40), Bachelor (265), and Master (10). It is also worth observing that the percentage of employees who have a Master's degree as compared to the total number of employees is the lowest in the Local Government panel. Also, a closer look at the data presented in Table 6.2.5. reveals that almost 20% of those who have a Master's degree are unemployed, a percentage which is relatively low as compared to those unemployed with a Bachelor's degree, which is almost 50%.

Similarly, the areas in which the qualifications were obtained were sought and are presented in Table 6.2.6. Almost 40% had obtained qualifications in education, and about a quarter (24.2%) had qualifications in business studies.

TABLE 6.2.6: QUALIFICATIONS ACHIEVED AND IN SUBJECT AND DISCIPLINE AREAS

Qualification	Group Panel					Frequency (Valid)	% (Valid)
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed		
Engineering	36	3	0	0	6	45	3.3
Health and Medicine	50	6	3	50	26	135	10.0
Education	10	5	14	189	315	533	39.5
Languages	14	4	42	18	36	114	8.5
Business Studies	66	96	98	22	45	327	24.2
Marketing	1	6	2	3	15	27	2.0
Human Resources	11	8	3	12	13	47	3.5
Creative Arts Media	1	17	8	13	20	59	4.4
Computer/IT	3	13	10	12	14	52	3.9
Other	3	0	3	0	0	6	.3
Law	0	0	0	4	0	4	.4
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100

Table 6.2.6. highlights the distribution of qualifications across all five group panels. The majority of the participants have obtained qualifications in education: however, more than half of these are unemployed (315), while most of the remaining work for Local Government (189). The three companies, Company A, company B and company C, prove to be mainly interested in hiring those who have obtained their qualifications in business studies. Within these companies, those who have specialised in education represent one of the categories which are less represented.

The survey also aimed to analyse whether the respondents are local graduates or whether they have studied abroad. The data reflecting this aspect is presented in Table 6.2.7 and it is useful for obtaining a better understanding of the five groups' profile.

The survey on the qualifications of the respondents shows that 88.1% of the respondents obtained their qualification within Saudi Arabia (i.e. are local graduates), while the other 11.9% graduated from abroad.

TABLE 6.2.7: WHERE QUALIFICATIONS WERE OBTAINED

Variable Group	Group Panel					Frequency (Valid)	% (Valid)
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed		
In Saudi Arabia	134	92	165	316	481	1188	88.1
Abroad	61	66	18	7	9	161	11.1
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100

The data received across the five groupings/organisations (Company A, company B, company C, Local Government, and ‘unemployed’) revealed that whereas about 40% of local graduates are from the “unemployed grouping”, the rest (about 60 %) were from company C, Company A, company B, and local government. On the other hand, of those who obtained their qualifications abroad, only about 5% were from the “unemployed grouping”, the rest (about 95%) were from the four other groupings.

These data would suggest a policy practiced whereby graduates who have obtained their qualifications locally are given priority over graduates who have obtained their qualifications from abroad. This is perhaps to ease the unemployment pressure on the ‘national database’. The researcher’s assertion seems to be borne out by looking at company C, which is a multinational organization yet has the highest proportion of local graduate employees, more than even Company A, which is a wholly Saudi owned and managed organisation. The same position was offered by a majority of those interviewed as part of this study. Therefore, the expectations appear to be that the absorption of locally qualified graduates could address the unemployment challenges for public and private sector development.

A review of the literature as part of this study has shown that educational qualifications are an important factor for skills development. However, males in Saudi have historically been more exposed to opportunities than females. It was not until after the 1960s that female educational aspirations began to be given some attention.



Furthermore, it has been relatively easier and quicker for females from Saudi to graduate outside the country than locally.

The study also sought to ascertain the subject area, field of study or disciplines covered by the qualifications achieved. Ascertaining the actual field of study and qualifications is important because there is a possibility that some respondents might either be over- or under-qualified for the current job market. Whereas an organisation often has various positions calling for diverse qualifications, some people have multiple skills. Therefore, this question is important for indicating the flexibility of their employment prospects as well as their leadership skills to others who need guidance. The question of study and qualification is also important for mapping promotion prospects in the organization. Furthermore, if an organization seeks people with particular preferred qualifications, there is a possibility that search and recruitment will follow the same trend.

The same position applies to three of the companies, company A, company C and company B Bank, which have different and given qualification needs. The number of unemployed people with different qualifications is arguably an indication of how much labour is available in the market on supply.

The data revealed that 39.5% of the qualifications obtained were in “education”, and 24.2% were in “business” skills. This indicates that almost 64% of the qualifications were either in education or business skills.

From a closer and more detailed level of inspection across the five groupings/organisations, the data revealed that organizations will always attract more staff in fields of their core business. Company C has a proportionately higher number of people with language as well as business qualifications, perhaps due to the multinational nature of their business and the need for translators.

Education qualifications are more prevalent at company C, perhaps because they emphasize continuous training to improve customer services. The high number of graduates from the “unemployed grouping” with education qualifications denotes the push for females to train in this field while being “locked” out of other sectors for various reasons. This implies that the process of Saudisation has some way to go in order to ensure that equality filters back from training opportunities to actual job opportunities (Fakeeh, 2009). Similarly, the relatively high responses on engineering qualifications from Company A are mainly due to the fact that the gas and oil industry needs these skills. The skills are for energy exploration, manufacturing, plant operations, transportation and equipment maintenance jobs (ILO, 2010).

As discussed earlier in the thesis, some studies have shown that the average young Saudi person is now accessing better educational standards compared to previous years (Kammer, 2013). Therefore, these better-qualified youths, arguably, are likely to be more productive and also able to achieve higher standards of living (Blanchard et al., 2013).

The overall Saudi labour market has been expanding in tandem with the country’s economy, yet unemployment figures are still relatively high across various sectors. Some studies have also shown that the youth and females are often the groups most affected by the unemployment situation (Kammer, 2013). The Saudi government has invested huge resources to the education sector: often over 20% of the GDP. These efforts are aimed at increasing the labour force skills and making these skilled people attractive to private firms (Gonzalez, et al., 2011). The overall objective of the Saudi government while educating its citizens is to increase labour force competitiveness and align skills with available jobs. Similarly, recent education policies have been targeting females in order to improve their job participation and general economic performance (Kammer, 2013).

## Demographics by sector

The study also aimed to analyse the labour market from the perspective of the public and private sector dynamic, for purposes of identifying which sector offers more employment opportunities for jobs seekers and whether the proportions are also validated by a similar distribution within the unemployed group. The questionnaire data revealed that of the 70.5% of those of those currently employed, 28.4% were from the private sector and 42.1% from the public sector. Almost 30% of respondents were unemployed (Table 6.2.8.).

TABLE 6.2.8: PUBLIC-PRIVATE SECTOR PARTICIPANTS

<b>Public-Private Sector Participants</b>	Group Panel					Frequency (Valid)	% (Valid)
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed		
Public	195	0	0	323	50	568	42.1
Private	0	158	183	0	42	383	28.4
None	0	0	0	0	398	398	29.5
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100

As can be observed in Table 6.2.8, most of those unemployed are neither former employees of the public sector, nor former employees of the private sector, but job seekers who have never had a job before. This supports the idea that experience is critical for increasing one's chances of acquiring a job and that being able to prove experience is more relevant than arguing for it having been obtained while working in the public or private sector. The data also indicate that the unemployed, as a percentage of the total number of participants corresponding to both the private and public sector is similar. 50 out of 568 respondents corresponding to the public sector are unemployed (almost 9%), and 42 out of the total 383 corresponding to the private sector (almost 11%).

Similarly, the data from the questionnaire survey revealed that 62.3% were working on a full-time basis, and only about 8% were part-time workers. Less than 1% of the staff were working on a flexible working pattern basis. In the study, almost 30% were unemployed.

## Employment status

Considering the importance of the flexible working schedule in creating employment opportunities for diverse demographic groups, one of the study's objectives was to investigate the employment status of respondents and assess whether flexibility in respect of the nature of work is already a manifest reality, or only a potential means of improvement of labour market opportunities of these demographic groups. This question is important on two fronts. First, the data for employment in Saudi Arabia show a significant level of unemployment. Second, evidence from the current study shows that informal employment contracts such as part time and flexible patterns of work can be used to bridge the gap between female and male labour market accessibility and reduce unemployment.

The profiles of the five groups from the point of view of their employment status can be better determined by observing the data presented in Table 6.2.9.

TABLE 6.2.9: NATURE OF THE WORK - FULL TIME, PART-TIME, OR FLEXIBLE WORKING PATTERN

Variable Group	Group Panel					Frequency (Valid)	% (Valid)
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed		
N/A (unemployed)	0	0	0	0	392	392	29.1
Part – Time	50	0	0	22	34	106	7.9
Full – Time	145	154	183	298	60	840	62.2
Flexible working pattern	0	4	0	3	4	11	0.8
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100

Out of the four potential employer organisations (company A, company C, company B and the Local government), company A stands out as the one which provides more flexibility for its employees, with 26% of those questioned working on a part-time schedule. The Local Government also offers a variety of working schedules.

Although the percentage is low, approximately 8% of the respondents representing Local Government employees declared that they were working on a flexible schedule and, in that regard, the diversity of working patterns is greater than in the case of other groups analysed. While company A and company B Bank provide two types of working patterns (company A - full-time and part-time and company B – full-time and flexible), the Local Government provides three types of working patterns (part-time, full-time and flexible). Out of the three potential working patterns, the full-time schedule is the most common and the best represented – 62.3%, while the flexible working pattern is the least common – 0.8%. The study also sought to gauge the period of time it took the participants to the questionnaire to secure a job/or have been looking for a job.

### **Length of time taken for female graduates to gain employment**

It was also important to determine how long it takes to secure employment/get a job. This issue is important because there are instances where people who have graduate qualifications take a long time to be absorbed into the job market. The result is the accumulation of skilled but redundant labour, which is neither productive nor beneficial to the economy.

Table 6.2.10 illustrates the experience which job seekers have had in their search for employment in terms of time spent looking for a job. As with the preceding sections, it presents the data in terms of the experiences of respondents from the five data group categories (company A, company B, company C, Local government and the unemployed).

TABLE 6.2.10: SEARCHING TIME FOR A JOB

Please indicate the period of time for job search	Group Panel					Frequency (Valid)	% (Valid)
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed		
One Month or Less	44	22	44	48	0	158	11.7
Two to Three Month	34	27	44	68	0	173	12.8
Four to Six Month	31	53	42	53	0	179	13.3
Seven to Twelve Month	38	20	28	65	111	262	19.5
Twelve month to two years	48	36	25	73	103	285	21.1
Three years to five years	0	0	0	8	110	118	8.7
five years to seven years	0	0	0	0	49	49	3.6
seven years to nine years	0	0	0	0	50	50	3.7
From nine years and more	0	0	0	8	67	75	5.6
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100

The study revealed that almost 40% were able to find employment within six months of looking for a job, whereas it took 21.7% of the respondents between twelve months and two years to secure employment. Similarly, only about 21% spent over two years attempting to gain employment.

It is interesting to notice that neither one of the three companies involved in the study have employed Saudi female graduates who were searching for a job for more than two years, except for a negligible percentage, 5%, which points to exceptional cases, because the vast majority of those who were unable to obtain a job for two years remained unemployed.

Almost 60% indicated that it took them less than twelve months to obtain a job. Interestingly, 21% noted that it took them between twelve months and 2 years to secure a job. The trend in the duration for which individuals look for jobs in Saudi Arabia is in conformance with theories of open external labour markets where the populations are perpetually looking for employment. Thus, demand and supply forces are always in play and are in most cases beyond the control of the person looking for a job (Hendry, 1995).

Despite the varied durations it takes to find employment in Saudi Arabia, the economy has been expanding. However, a concern is presented by the number of jobs taken up by foreign nationalities, hence seemingly denying Saudis opportunities (Blanchard et al., 2013).

In order for the criteria to be relevant, the time spent looking for employment needs to be analysed in correspondence to the effort invested in this search and, consequently, with the concrete measures undertaken. To address this aspect, the study also sought to gauge the number of applications submitted in search of employment in public Saudi firms, private Saudi firms, and in foreign multi-national firms. The data corresponding to these objectives are presented in Tables 6.2.11, 6.2.12 and 6.2.13. Table 6.2.11. illustrates the distribution of workforce according to the number of applications submitted for public Saudi firms.

TABLE 6.2.11: NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED FOR PUBLIC SAUDI FIRMS

Please indicate the number of applications you submitted in total to public firms	Group Panel					Frequency (valid)	% (Valid)
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed		
0	0	0	43	0	16	59	4.4
1 to 10	170	150	112	225	207	864	64
11 to 20	13	2	14	62	104	195	14.5
21 to 50	4	6	10	22	110	152	11.3
51+	8	0	4	14	53	79	5.9
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100

For every group panel describing an institution that is able to provide employment, the proportions indicating the number of applications submitted for public Saudi firms remain similar. Most of those employed by one of the four job providers have declared that they have submitted no more than 10 applications (company A – 87%, company B – 95%, company C – 61%, Local Government – 70%). The number of those who have submitted

more than ten applications is significantly lower for all groups involved in the survey: company A – 13%, company B –5%, company C – 15%, Local Government – 30%.

For public, private and foreign firms, majority of respondents noted that they submitted no more than 10 applications. There are marginally more applications for jobs in the public sector when compared to private and foreign firms. Table 6.2.12. illustrates the distribution of the workforce based on the number of applications submitted for private Saudi firms.

TABLE 6.2.12: NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED FOR PRIVATE SAUDI FIRMS

Please indicate the number of applications you submitted in total to private	Group Panel					Total (frequency)	% (Valid)
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed		
0	120	75	73	168	132	568	42.1
1 to 10	64	74	90	133	232	593	44
11 to 20	5	7	14	15	78	119	8.8
21 to 50	6	2	4	7	44	63	4.7
51+	0	0	2	0	4	6	0.4
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100

Most of those employed by one of the four employer organisations have declared that they have not submitted applications for private Saudi firms. For all groups involved in the survey, the percentage of those who have submitted no more than 10 applications for private Saudi firms (company A – 33%, company B – 47%, company C – 49%, Local Government – 41%) is bigger than the percentage of those who have submitted more than ten applications for private Saudi firms: company A – 5%, company B –5%, company C – 16%, Local Government – 7%. Perhaps not surprisingly, the unemployed tended to make more applications.

Table 6.2.13. illustrates the distribution of workforce according to the number of applications submitted for foreign firms.



TABLE 6.2.13: NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED FOR FOREIGN FIRMS

Please indicate the number of applications you submitted in total to Foreign	Group Panel					Total (frequency)	% (valid)
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed		
0	135	72	7	169	249	632	46.9
1 to 10	50	82	155	141	187	615	45.6
11 to 20	2	2	6	11	9	30	2.2
21 to 50	4	0	13	2	39	58	4.3
51+	4	2	2	0	6	14	1
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100

Unsurprisingly, most of those hired by private companies or by Local Government have declared that they have not submitted applications to foreign firms. Otherwise, for all groups involved in the survey, the percentage of those who have submitted no more than 10 applications for foreign firms (company A – 25%, company B – 52%, company C – 85%, Local Government – 44%) is more than the percentage of those who have submitted more than ten applications for foreign firms: company A – 5%, company B – 3%, company C – 12%, Local Government – 4%.

### Saudi female graduates in employment

In order to better understand the dynamic of the Saudi workforce market it is important to look at the distribution of Saudi female graduates employees across Saudi firms and multinational firms. Table 6.2.14 presents the data illustrating this aspect.

TABLE 6.2.14: WHERE PARTICIPANTS CURRENTLY ARE EMPLOYED OR HAVE WORKED IN THE PAST

Variable Group	Group Panel					Frequency (Valid)	% (Valid)
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed		
None	0	0	0	0	392	392	29.1
Saudi Firm	195	158	0	323	74	750	55.6
Multinational Firm	0	0	183	0	24	207	15.3
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100

The number of those who are unemployed but who used to work in a Saudi firm is greater than those who are unemployed after previously having worked in a multinational firm (74 as compared to 24). However, these proportions are a reflection of the comparative number of multinational firm employees and Saudi firm employees as a percentage of the Saudi labour force (79% Saudi firms' employees and 21% multinational firms' employees). More relevant to the study is to analyse whether there are any significant discrepancies between the percentages of unemployment corresponding to each of the two variable groups. 11.6% of the total number of Saudi firm employees were unemployed and 9.9% of the total number of multinational firm employees were unemployed when they were hired for their current jobs.

Although a slight difference can be noticed, it can be concluded that there are no significant discrepancies which could point to a relevant trend in the processes characterising the Saudi workforce market.

The survey answers to this question established that across the participating organizations, over 55% work with a Saudi firm, while about 15% work with a foreign multinational as indicated. A closer consideration of the data reveals that all the Company B workers worked for a Saudi firm. At company A, all workers also work for a Saudi firm. In company C, however, most if not all workers work for foreign multinationals.

It could be the case that company C has more responses for foreign multinational firms due to its ownership structures, while company A and company B attract more workers from Saudi firms due to their local stake and management structures. It is also established that company A has some foreign multinational workers who have expert skills which are not available locally.

Having presented the demographic characteristics of various panel groups in terms of age, the qualifications (both in terms of subject discipline as well as level of education and whether the degrees were obtained from local institutions or abroad) and the demographics corresponding to the public and private sector in the previous section, the next section aims to provide a detailed description of the labour market following the main research themes and focus on: “Policy”, “Expectation from the Government” and “Women’s pathways to finding jobs”. As indicated previously, these discussions do not include gender differences in labour market opportunities. That issue is covered in Chapter 7.

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### 6.3 LABOUR MARKET

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Analysing the main aspects characterising and influencing the labour market implies reflecting on the pertinence of the policy adopted and how useful it proves in answering the expectations from the government. It also requires analysis of the extent to which respondents share the expectations of the government and, in – depth research to reveal the available or potential resources and options for women to secure employment. All aspects presented in this section are important pillars for the study as they can serve as evidence for the current state of being, thus demonstrating the necessity for improvement, as well as contributing to the development of relevant suggestions which can contribute to improvement. The political, educational and economic aspects raised and discussed are all based on the survey findings and on the opinions which respondents expressed during semi – structured interviews. First, the findings on policy will be presented.

As stated at the end of the preceding section (6.2), this section will present and discuss the findings from the survey and interviews framed around three themes: (1) labour market and employment policy; (2) Saudi female graduates’ expectation from the government and (3) women pathway to employment. These themes are crucial to the research aims for two interrelated reasons. First, understanding existing policy is also critical to understanding the current state of affairs.

Second, a critical understanding of relevant policy also requires comprehension of the underlying objectives in terms of government expectations, which are only useful in so far as they address existing problems by improving female job seekers' ability to secure employment that is commensurate to their academic and professional skills and competence. The section begins with the presentation of the findings on policy.

### **6.3.1 Policy**

As it refers to current social reality, it is important for this study to discuss the socio-political context which constitutes the background for the manifestation of the aspects discussed. The strategies defined and implemented in order to increase the number of female employees are directly connected to the existing perception of the potential contribution women could make to the economic and social development of Saudi Arabia. However, beyond a declarative level, the strength and success of such strategies can only be evaluated by other concrete measures that facilitate and sustain their implementation such as the commitment to educate females or the directives that aim to encourage companies to hire women. The survey was conducted to verify the current solutions proposed to address unemployment among educated Saudi females, explore whether they are based on a shared conviction that females can contribute to the economic development of Saudi Arabia and whether they are defined as concrete and useful measures which are capable of achieving the aim they were created for.

In the Saudi context, labour market and employment policy related aspects can also be discussed relative to the Saudisation process (see section 2.3) and especially with respect to the argument that, in spite of the policy, there are no significant changes to be reported regarding either governmental, or societal attitude to females in the workplace over the last two decades (Al-Bakr, 1990; Flynn, 2011), Rutledge et al., 2011).

Public policy can be driven by the self-preservation needs of the powers that be, or a genuine concern to address and provide for a common problem or public good. However, often, the two can be interrelated in the sense that failure to address a public problem can create social unrest and threaten political, social and economic order. Labour market indigenisation policies such as Saudisation are intended to address, among other things, youth unemployment, which has the potential to further alienate young people, with the potential consequences of social unrest and threats to the political and social order (Alsheikh, 2015; Ramady, 2010). Understanding relevant public policy is therefore important to understanding the policy context for the labour market and employment situation of the female graduate, who may, rightly assume the pursuit of higher education not as an end in itself, but, rather, as a means of gaining better labour market opportunities in a social context where opportunities are historically difficult to come by.

In order to analyse the current government policies on graduate female labour, the researcher will initially discuss the contribution of this group to the Saudi labour market. The survey on female graduates can contribute to the Saudi Arabian economy to map labour flexibility, employee commitment and analyse the future trajectory. This question also serves the purpose of aggregating females as potential contributors to the Saudi Arabian GDP.

Table 6.3.1a present the views of the respondents to the questionnaire survey regarding the contribution of female graduates to the economy of Saudi Arabia. As with all findings presented earlier and subsequently, respondents are asked to indicate their degree of agreement/disagreement with the statement that “female graduates can make a major contribution to the economic development of Saudi Arabia” and their responses are categorised in accordance with the group panel and analysed in terms of statistical frequency, mean and standard deviation.

TABLE 6.3.1A: FEMALE GRADUATES' CONTRIBUTION TO THE ECONOMY

Variable Group	Group Panel					Frequency (valid)	% (Valid)	Mean	Standard Deviation
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed				
Disagree Strongly	0	0	3	3	6	12	0.9	4.7079	0.66210
Disagree Slightly	0	0	3	0	15	18	1.3		
Neutral	1	0	0	19	10	30	2.2		
Agree Slightly	31	15	21	65	100	232	17.2		
Agree Strongly	163	143	156	236	359	1057	78.4		
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100		

The survey on the possibility that female graduates in Saudi Arabia can make a contribution across the three organizations shows that 78.4% agree strongly, 17.2% agree slightly and 2.2% are neutral, 1.3% disagree slightly and 0.9% disagree strongly, including those who are unemployed. Furthermore, at an organisational level, the researcher can confirm the same pattern, with the majority of respondents per group panel agreeing strongly with the statement. The mean value of close to 5 (4.7079), indicates that most of the participants agree that female graduates can make a major contribution to the economy and development of Saudi Arabia". The KW test results as shown in Table 6.3.1b are consistent with this pattern.

TABLE 6.3.1B: KW TEST ON FEMALE GRADUATES' CONTRIBUTION TO THE ECONOMY

Group (Control Variables)	Group Categories	Mean Rank	Test	Asymp. Sig. (p)
Company	A B C Local Government Unemployed	714.56 759.81 720.58 638.12 639.19	KW Test	.000*
Age	18-24 25-34 35-44 45-60	685.37 665.76 675.27 789.56	KW Test	.044*
Place of study	Graduated in Saudi-Arabia Graduated abroad	667.15 732.93	KW Test	0.005*
Degree Qualification	Engineering Health Medicine Education Languages Business Studies Marketing Human Resources Creative Arts Media Computer/IT Law Other	655.11 691.13 612.68 764.46 719.06 653.52 738.72 703.12 721.85 713.58 821.00	KW Test	.000*
Level of Degree Education	High school Diploma Bachelor Master	659.88 553.46 667.47 729.31	KW Test	.001*
Type of Firm	None A Saudi Firm Multinational Firm	633.20 692.22 691.75	KW Test	.002*
Employment Sector	Private Public None	674.79 725.90 626.32	KW Test	.000*
Type of Employment	Full-Time Part-Time Flexible None	633.20 643.44 696.58 821.00	KW Test	.000*
Period to gaining employment	One Month or Less Two to Three Month Four to Six Month Seven to Twelve Month Twelve month to two years Three years to five years Five years to seven years Seven years to nine years From nine years and more	690.47 668.95 704.53 671.51 721.08 628.73 525.59 576.09 659.33	KW Test	.000*

Note: (\*) Statistically significant at 5% level; (\*\*) Statistically significant at 10%

Table 6.3.1b shows that there is statistical evidence to suggest that females are believed to contribute significantly to the economy and development irrespective of the company where the respondents come from, their age, their level of study, the level of qualification they possess, and the sector they work in. Thus, the findings demonstrate that the different group panels from the survey are certain of the positive contribution of female graduate to the Saudi economy. The following section will analyse how the government acknowledge this contribution and what is being done to integrate graduate females into the labour market.

The answer to the question on the government of Saudi Arabia's commitment to empower female graduates is to participate in various employment or economic growth initiatives are documented in Table 6.3.2a.

TABLE 6.3.2A: VIEWS ON GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO INCREASE FEMALE PARTICIPATION

Variable Group	Group Panel					Frequency (valid)	% (Valid)	Mean	Standard Deviation
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed				
Disagree Strongly	7	10	5	21	66	109	8.1	3.5330	1.24451
Disagree Slightly	28	22	19	40	108	217	16.1		
Neutral	44	30	28	46	53	201	14.9		
Agree Slightly	70	58	86	134	142	490	36.3		
Agree Strongly	46	38	45	82	121	332	24.6		
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100		

Table 6.3.2a established that 24.6% agree strongly, 36.3% agree slightly, 14.9% are neutral, 16.1% disagree slightly and 8.1% disagree strongly including the unemployed. The mean value of 3.5330 confirms that more than 50% of the respondents are in agreement with the statement that "the government ... is highly committed to increasing the participation of female graduates in the country". Although this is not a strong majority, it nevertheless indicates that a majority either agrees or strongly agrees.



Having presented the data in terms of the aggregate response of all the panels, now the researcher will explore the data at group panel level to see which groups agree less with the statement. Relevant data, analysed and tabulated in the same manner as the preceding table, are presented in Table 6.3.2b.

TABLE 6.3.2B: KW TEST ON THE VIEWS ON GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO INCREASE FEMALE PARTICIPATION

Group (Control Variables)	Group Categories	Mean Rank	Test	Asymp. Sig. (p)
Company	A B C Local Government Unemployed	686.12 683.13 743.53 712.32 617.76	KW Test	.000*
Age	18-24 25-34 35-44 45-60	605.34 682.34 705.90 750.72	KW Test	.006*
Degree Qualification	Engineering Health Medicine Education Languages Business Studies Marketing Human Resources Creative Arts Media Computer/IT Law Other	747.92 594.24 650.49 762.29 683.19 548.35 809.47 699.02 695.29 1057.42 772.50	KW Test	.000*
Level of Degree Education	High school Diploma Bachelor Master	1080.75 616.95 664.70 716.90	KW Test	.003*
Period to gaining employment	One Month or Less Two to Three Month Four to Six Month Seven to Twelve Month Twelve month to two years Three years to five years Five years to seven years Seven years to nine years From nine years and more	704.55 715.08 686.69 703.98 615.03 584.74 867.04 496.09 754.87	KW Test	.000*

Note: (\*) Statistically significant at 5% level; (\*\*) Statistically significant at 10%

All control variables are statistically significant at 5% significance value, as their estimated p-values are below 0.05, implying that those pertaining to different group categories do not share the same opinion in relation to the statement evaluated by table 6.3.2b.

The ranking of mean values varies between different group categories pertaining to the same control variable.

For example, in the case of Degree qualification, the mean rank of 1057.42 shows that those with a degree in law have expressed a significantly different opinion from those with a degree in marketing (548.35) or from those who have a degree in education (650.49).

Similarly, when asked if organisations in the country were less committed to employing female graduates, 84.4% responded that this was the case. Table 6.3.3a presents the opinions of the survey participants with respect to the attitude of organisations in Saudi Arabia to employing female graduates.

TABLE 6.3.3A: VIEWS ON ORGANISATIONS' COMMITMENT TO EMPLOY EDUCATED FEMALE

Variable Group	Group Panel					Frequency (valid)	% (Valid)	Mean	Standard Deviation
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed				
Disagree Strongly	5	2	7	3	13	30	2.2	4.3091	0.97753
Disagree Slightly	14	15	23	7	11	70	5.2		
Neutral	27	27	29	17	10	110	8.2		
Agree Slightly	61	75	65	97	84	382	28.3		
Agree Strongly	88	39	59	199	372	757	56.1		
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100		

In the same vein, 56.1% of the respondents to the questionnaire either slightly or strongly agreed that foreign multi-nationals were more likely to hire Saudi female graduates than Saudi firms, and only about 21% either slightly or strongly disagreed. The mean value of 4.3091 indicates that a strong majority of the respondents “believe that whilst the government is committed to educating females in Saudi Arabia, organisations in the country are less committed to employing us” [female graduates].

TABLE 6.3.3B: KW TEST ON VIEWS ON ORGANISATIONS' COMMITMENT TO EMPLOY EDUCATED FEMALE

Group (Control Variables)	Group Categories	Mean Rank	Test	Asymp. Sig. (p)
Company	A B C Local Government Unemployed	590.42 463.25 489.13 728.55 811.05	KW Test	.000*
Place of study	Graduated in Saudi-Arabia Graduated abroad	684.75 603.03	KW Test	0.005*
Degree Qualification	Engineering Health Medicine Education Languages Business Studies Marketing Human Resources Creative Arts Media Computer/IT Law Other	540.76 653.59 772.55 685.94 554.94 766.87 677.87 734.94 479.72 303.42 971.00	KW Test	.000*
Level of Degree Education	High school Diploma Bachelor Master	470.31 595.36 690.81 624.95	KW Test	.007*
Type of Firm	None A Saudi Firm Multinational Firm	798.00 646.59 545.00	KW Test	.000*
Employment Sector	Private Public None	688.90 523.86 800.61	KW Test	.000*
Type of Employment	Full-Time Part-Time Flexible None	624.93 613.05 712.14 798.00	KW Test	.000*
Period to gaining employment	One Month or Less Two to Three Month Four to Six Month Seven to Twelve Month Twelve month to two years Three years to five years Five years to seven years Seven years to nine years From nine years and more	544.04 610.84 521.63 684.73 699.93 874.47 704.27 837.23 895.07	KW Test	.000*

Note: (\*) Statistically significant at 5% level; (\*\*) Statistically significant at 10%

Table 6.3.3b examines the significance of control variables on the notion that 'organisations in the country are less committed to employing Saudi female graduates'.

The eight control variables – company, place of work, academic qualification, type of employment, field of study etc., were statistically significant at a significance level of 5%.

With an estimated p-value below 0.050, the findings denote key differences between the responses directed at this control variable. For example, in the case of the employment sector, the mean rank of 688.90 shows that those working in the private sector have expressed a significantly different opinion from those in the public sector (523.86).

The question on whether multinationals are more likely to hire Saudi female graduates than local Saudi firms was important to check labour flexibility and employee commitment and analysis of the future trajectory of the employment of female graduates in Saudi Arabia. This question was important because foreign multinationals tend to be more “liberal” than Saudi firms during their recruitment exercises. Additionally, this question is useful in mapping the trends of human resource preferences so that Saudi female graduates can focus their efforts on appropriate organizations while more flexible recruitment cultures and policies.

The study also sought to establish whether foreign multinationals are more likely to hire Saudi female graduates compared to Saudi firms’ practices. Table 6.3.4a presents findings provided by the participants’ responses to the survey statement about the likelihood of multinational corporations to employ female graduates.

TABLE 6.3.4A: FOREIGN MULTI-NATIONALS AND LIKELIHOOD OF HIRING SAUDI FEMALE GRADUATES THAN SAUDI FIRMS

Variable Group	Group Panel					Frequency (valid)	% (Valid)	Mean	Standard Deviation
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed				
Disagree Strongly	5	3	3	34	70	115	8.5	3.4507	1.16131
Disagree Slightly	15	11	22	55	60	163	12.1		
Neutral	59	46	52	66	81	304	22.5		
Agree Slightly	76	82	77	119	179	533	39.5		
Agree Strongly	40	16	29	49	100	234	17.4		
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100		

Interestingly, 56.9% of the respondents to the questionnaire survey either slightly agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that foreign multi-nationals are more likely to hire Saudi female graduates than Saudi firms. Although the mean value of 3.4507 confirms the majority's agreement, 20.6% of the respondents indicated disagreement and 22.5% express a neutral view about the likelihood of multinational corporations in Saudi Arabia hiring female graduates.

TABLE 6.3.4B KW TEST ON FOREIGN MULTI-NATIONALS MORE LIKELY TO HIRE SAUDI FEMALE GRADUATES THAN SAUDI FIRMS.

Group (Control Variables)	Group Categories	Mean Rank	Test	Asymp. Sig. (p)
Company	A B C Local Government Unemployed	730.61 705.58 699.51 627.38 665.25	KW Test	.019*
Age	18-24 25-34 35-44 45-60	726.69 668.70 624.59 815.06	KW Test	.001*
Level of Degree Education	High school Diploma Bachelor Master	591.56 574.28 660.75 757.98	KW Test	.001*

Note: (\*) Statistically significant at 5% level; (\*\*) statistically significant at 10%

All control variables are statistically significant at 5% significance value, as their estimated p-values are below 0.05, implying that different group categories do not share the same opinion in relation to the statement evaluated by Table 6.3.4b. The ranking of mean values varies between different group categories pertaining to the same control variable. For example, in the case of Company, the mean rank of 665.25 shows that those who are unemployed have expressed a significantly different opinion from those working for Company B (705.58) or Company A (730.61), with the former indicating a more negative view about the likelihood of multinational corporations hiring female graduates.

## Interviews

In order to provide a more nuanced perspective on the aspects under investigations (policy, government expectation and female job seeking strategies and practices), the researcher considered it necessary to triangulate the statistical data obtained through the questionnaire by considering the more elaborate answers that were collected through semi-structured interviews

During the survey, a female employee from company A commented in her questionnaire answers, “The government and businessmen should start projects to help working mothers. These are day care centres for providing temporary housemaids working by hour for a reasonable wage. In addition, transportation means female friendly modes that are good for commuting within same district to help lessen traffic congestion. Reconsider the ban on female driving, as this will make so many things easier for all of the female working force. Providing all high school graduates with a good education in good universities for free or at least minimum cost.”

Interestingly, when those who were interviewed were asked a similar question, an overwhelming view emerged that they believe that female graduates (and indeed females generally) contribute immensely to the Saudi Arabian economy. This can be observed from the comments offered below by some of those interviewed.

The interviewees express the belief that Saudi women can, due to the qualifications they have achieved, contribute to the country’s economic development. They are, in that respect, generally regarded as valuable assets for potential employers and therefore investment in their development (i.e. through on work training) is viewed as being a sound and, eventually, profitable proposition. In discussions about women’s contribution to the economy, the interviewees note the significant role women play as consumers.

If this perspective is placed in direct relation to their purchasing power, then the need to provide more hiring opportunities makes even more sense. Women have the potential to contribute to economic development and this potential ends up being limited if they are not encouraged and given the opportunity to become active forces in the workforce environment. As one interviewee noted:

“A growing number of Saudi women now have useful qualifications, and the potential to contribute, these (female) untapped potential resources can contribute immensely to the country’s economic development. Great value is derived not only from recruiting women, but also from the diversity of thought that women can help provide, as well as the use of their talent pool. Steady benefit that is earned by making wise, balanced investments in developing women as workers should not be underestimated, as well as understanding women as consumers and their impact on the economy”.

Besides being considered assets to actual and/or potential employers due to their specific characteristics, skills and talents, it is argued by the interviewees that women should also be considered valuable employees due to the fact that they can provide a balanced working environment gender-wise. The differences between them and the male dominated workplace can create what some described as desirable and complementary parts of a sound and complete construct which can benefit the working environment. In that regard, another interviewee stated that:

“Females make and would continue to make a highly valuable contribution to Saudi Arabia. It is important to encourage the hiring of females and also encourage their professional development and progress throughout their careers. They would make valuable contributions since they would balance operations within the organization- gender-wise. Also, they would bring different capabilities and creative talents to their roles than males would and keep the business fresh and innovative”.

Naturally, there is some evidence of what can be described as gender bias, with suggestions by some interviewees of women being more valuable than men. Unfortunately, since such views are not supported by objective facts, they may have to be rejected as exaggerated. Although one might agree that women “tend to achieve excellent results with few errors”, suggestions that women are close to a potential perfect employee benchmark represent an exaggeration and perhaps an unhelpful discussion in the male dominated political, social and economic context of Saudi Arabia.

“In Saudi Arabia, females are a great addition to any organization. Mostly, if given the responsibility and empowerment, they tend to achieve excellent results with few errors.”

Some of the views which are advanced to characterise women as good employees are not in fact only unique to women as a gender category. For example, suggestions, as some of the interviews do, that women’s educational attainment proves that they [women] have the ability to understand the value of their work. However, this argument again is not specific enough to truly highlight the potential advantage women might have. One’s ability to evaluate her/his work is not unique to any particular gender. The fact that an educated person might prove more competent to effectively do and evaluate his or her own activity is by no means specific to one gender. Thus, while there is some truth to the quotation below, the attributes that it refers to are not exclusive to any particular gender category.

“Female employees will add a lot of value to the workplace because women by nature have a high sense of responsibility, let alone the graduate employees who are highly educated and are fully aware of the value of work.”

Perhaps the more credible arguments by the interviewees are those that suggest that women have comparable ability and competence to contribute to economic and business development. These views refer to women as being equally as valuable as men and suggest that inherent differences between the two genders can be complementary and result in better outcomes.



Thus, for example, one interviewee noted:

“Women, like men, have skills that are invaluable to sustaining a successful business. Each individual adds their set of capabilities and to limit these to only one gender, or one age group, or one nationality does not do anybody a service”.

Despite the different tones which characterise the statements presented above, it should not be ignored that they are all based on the genuine belief that women can contribute to economic and social development and should be provided the chance to do so. Assuming such a strong attitude in respect to their potential, women also indicate that they have the strength to assume the responsibility that comes with such opportunities.

During the interview stage of the study, one of the female employees from Company A commented that, “I was hired from the USA. I was teaching at the University of Central Florida, Orlando as a graduate assistant teaching ‘Introduction to Computer Science’. Unfortunately, my country did not appreciate my talents and expertise. I graduated from Indiana University’s Computer Science (Hardware and Software) and Philosophy Honours Programme. I am currently the Chair of IEEE Women in Engineering, Saudi Section.”

### **Interviewees understanding the employment situation female graduates KSA**

As part of the twenty-eight semi-structured interviews conducted, the researcher sought to uncover the level of understanding of the respondents with regard to the employment situation for female graduates in the country and the role of the Ministry of Education in this regard. The reasons for this are twofold. Firstly, this was explored to establish that the respondents were familiar with the subject area being investigated and able to offer information that is credible and can add credence to the study. Secondly, this was done to be able to elicit qualitative data sets from stakeholders who are “actors/participants” involved in the general areas of the employment of female graduates in Saudi Arabia.

The interviewees were asked the following question: Can you kindly explain to me your current understanding of the employment situation for female graduates in the country, and the role of the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education? This question raised some interesting observations from the respondents, such as the ones discussed below.

The interview data is consistent with findings from the survey regarding views on the role of the Ministry of Higher Education in improving the labour market situation of female graduates. Accordingly, most of the interviewees also asserted that the Ministry displays a positive attitude towards helping Saudi graduate women to be employed, and that it plays an important and active role in increasing their chances of reaching their goal. One of the respondents described the Ministry as being involved in an ongoing process of developing a useful policy in this respect. The trust granted to the Ministry is based on the belief that the state authority is responsible and eager to contribute to the current work environment issues, and that it “always considers the individual as the main axis in every development plan”. Also, the Ministry is believed to provide equal chances for students to gain access to quality training, irrespective of gender differences. The same respondent considers that the issue of Saudi women is appropriately addressed by education policy, which seeks to provide support for them to become an active part of the country’s development.

“Our Ministry of Higher Education is looking into a policy of encouraging graduates geared for the job market. The Ministry always considers the individual as the main axis in every development plan. The plan of Higher Education is primarily to promote the standards of male and female students alike. This stems from the policy of education in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia and which is aimed at the provision of skills which are relevant with the needs of development, especially with regard to Saudi women; and providing for her the relevant and useful knowledge; and to equip her with skills with which she can participate in the positive development”.

Another interviewee cited two state directives regarding the imperatives that need to be answered in relation to female education and national acknowledgement of the issue as evidence of the Ministry of Higher Education's concern and support for women who seek employment. Accordingly, the interviewee notes:

“The Ministry of Higher Education is seriously seeking employing women in the KSA for the following reasons. (i) To carry out royal directive number 121 on 7/1432 AH which contained 20 different programmes in commerce and industry. (ii) To re-enact directive number 120 from the cabinet office in 1426 to admit Saudi women to work. This is to help decrease the unemployment rate amongst women and increase opportunities for women willing to work. There is currently a lack of opportunities for women to work because that would require the provision of a separate work environment for women made by the employer”.

These views are also consistent with some of the literature on the implications of Saudi educational policy for female higher education attainment (UNDP, 2005a; Welsh *et al.*, 2013; Wang, 2013).

Another important aspect brought to the discussion through interviews is the topic of Saudisation, which is another measure introduced by the state to help Saudi nationals gain easier access to jobs. Although the policy does not have an exclusive gender focus, it has a clear implication for the unemployment rate of Saudi women. In fact, the necessity of imposing Saudisation can be looked at as representing a warning with respect to Saudi labour market problems and as a means of addressing the worsening situation of an already vulnerable group, Saudi women. The following quotation is indicative of respondents' views on the policy:

“The labour market in Saudi has depended heavily on foreign workers in the past years; expatriates constitute about 2/3 of the total workforce largely in the private sector. The rising unemployment rate among Saudis has caused the government to

launch the policy of “Saudisation” and expanded employment of Saudi nationals, as part of its strategic goal of creating a domestic labour force and preparing skilled labour”.

However, some of those interviewed argued that despite the Saudi Arabian job market being increasingly interested in acquiring well qualified and experienced professionals, it is still unable to take in sufficient numbers of indigenous Saudi workers. Accordingly, as one interviewee put it:

“On one hand, the job market in Saudi Arabia is characterised by a high degree of competition to attract best expertise to fill technical and executive posts. On the other hand that same job market is too weak to absorb the growing expertise from indigenous nationals well geared to enter employment and take part in the national development according to policy guidelines”.

Yet, for others, the problem concerns the under-development of the Saudi labour market. In that regard, it is the opinion of an interviewee that “the Saudi labour market needs a great deal of development in order to absorb the new influx of Saudi graduates and technicians”.

While some might perceive the Saudi Arabian job market as underdeveloped and insufficient even for local professionals seeking employment, others are able to put a positive turn on this market’s underdevelopment. Therefore, from a positive perspective the market seems full of potential and opportunities for those who are creative, talented, courageous and willing to experiment. The following quotation is representative of such positive views of the Saudi labour market:

“The labour market in Saudi Arabia is considered as a young and growing market which has the potential for the individual to experiment and develop ideas to serve the faith, the country and the individual”.

One of the interviewees even considered it necessary to mention that despite common prejudice, the Saudi job market should not be reduced to the oil and gas industry as its potential exceeds this limit, providing opportunities for those who have an interest in other fields as well. For this interviewee, “the current labour market in Saudi Arabia is becoming competitive for professional young talent in multiple fields not only for the Oil and Gas market”.

Although most of those interviewed presented a generally positive outlook regarding the Saudi labour market and the measures imposed by the government, there are voices who argue to the contrary. In that respect, one respondent, for example, expressed the view that the Saudi labour market is far from one reaching for high standards and, moreover, that the Saudisation policy has ended up producing more harm than good as it compels companies to hire local workers without any consideration for their liberty to choose in accordance with their own internal decisions, assessments and exigencies. According to one interviewee:

“Unfortunately, I believe we don’t have a solid Labour Market or one of “good standards”. Saudisation program didn’t really provide the effect required as most of the companies are only hiring Saudis because they were forced by the government. Yet things are changing now with more educated and talented young generation coming along”.

Another participant was less certain, if not ambiguous, about the state of the Saudi labour market. For this individual, the labour market can be perceived as either stable or characterized by a high rate of unemployment depending on how one looks at it. It is argued that unemployment corresponds to that segment of the market represented by fresh and inexperienced graduates, while more experienced professionals tend to have a more balanced view of the market.

The high unemployment rate is also associated with the extended learning opportunities provided by the government by financing scholarships abroad. For one interviewee with that point of view:

“The labour market situation in Saudi Arabia is twofold. On the one hand, there is a high rate of unemployment since we have a large percentage of unemployed graduates due to government scholarships opening the gates for funding studies abroad over the past few years, which increased the number of qualified and educated Saudi nationals seeking employment opportunities. On the other hand, I believe the employment situation is stable and even beginning to flourish for experienced professionals. For example, I have been head-hunted 4 times by recruitment companies. Also, all 4 opportunities were based in Saudi Arabia: 1 in Riyadh, 2 in Jeddah and 1 in the Eastern province. This example shows that there are work opportunities in Saudi Arabia. However, work opportunities available might be specific to industry professionals rather than being available for fresh graduates and so on”.

For majority of interviewees, the dynamics of the Saudi job market are often linked to government policies that regulate and, therefore, impose a certain attitude on hiring companies with respect to their potential employees. As indicated in earlier argument (see, p.313), The most common example cited by the interviewees is the policy of Saudisation, which seeks to increase the chances for local professionals to find jobs in companies that operate in the Saudi market. In that respect, the following quotation is representative of the general views shared by most interviewees:

“The Labour Market in Saudi is changing very quickly, especially with the current governmental focus in terms of localizing jobs (Saudisation).The King Abdullah Scholarship programme has brought a lot of qualified Saudis who are ready to be deployed. I believe such initiatives will add greatly to the availability of required candidates to fill vacancies within the labour market”.

The crucial issues in terms of the implications of the socio-cultural context for employment opportunities for women were also raised in the interviews. In that regard, one of the interviewees believes that the difficulties women face in trying to acquire jobs should be seen as being also a consequence of the environment they were raised in, which encouraged them to become dependent. Looked at from this perspective, for some, Saudi women's attempt to seek help from the government is associated with weakness and with a lack of experience in confronting challenges on their own and thus, as this interviewee put it; "Females are expecting the government to spoon-feed them even when it comes to getting a job." As such, they are perceived as failing to assume responsibility for their failures and they eventually end up turning the government into a scapegoat - "(...) [they] are unemployed and blaming the government for it". As more elaborately put by an interviewee:

"I believe that the low percentage of employed Saudi females inside the kingdom is due to several reasons and one of them is the fact that most Saudi females are raised to be dependents. Females are expecting the government to spoon-feed them even when it comes to getting a job. And this is normal given that most universities in Saudi Arabia are free of charge and even worse, students get paid for attending there. They graduate thinking the government is obliged to provide them with excellent jobs matching their excellent GPAs!! And therefore, most of my friends are unemployed and blaming the government for it!"

The above comments indicate a changing and fluid labour market grappling with how to address female graduate employment. There is the view that the education of female graduates is a good thing, but addressing the ways in which female graduates are recruited into employment appears more difficult. There is also the view that Saudisation (which is akin to "Saudi jobs for Saudi Workers" has not fully realised its benefits.

Similarly, there is also a more critical view that more also needs to be done by female graduates to help themselves into employment and not rely heavily on the government. Indeed, one of the interviewees noted that “it is important that new female graduates must be more serious in making the effort and be more positive. They should accept less than challenging or even demeaning positions in the beginning of their careers. Also they must show more willingness, acceptance and more enthusiasm when taken-on to work in both private and public companies, both national and foreign companies. Seriousness, commitment and enthusiasm are pre requisites when it comes to employment of new Saudi female graduates”.

## **Discussion**

Other studies have also shown that the participation of females in the job market in Saudi Arabia is important for GDP growth because all genders are involved in all economic spheres of the country. Additionally, globalization has improved the movement of “goods, services, investments and currencies between countries” (CADI, 2003). Therefore maximum labour market participation is a prospect that engages both females and males, and ensures minimal off-shoring and outsourcing of skills. Generally, it is always important to explore the local labour before crossing borders and female graduates in Saudi Arabia have shown intent and capacity for this supply. Moreover, the engagement of female graduates from Saudi will realize better skills utilization and lead other low skilled persons to aspire to higher qualifications whenever possible (Hickman & Olney, 2011). The prevailing “labour supply shock” (Hickman & Olney, 2011: 655) which could be facing Saudi Arabia can be addressed by the input of female graduates and the earnings will remain in the country instead of going overseas.



The researcher argues that the flexibility of labour markets determines how easily a foreign organization can hire a local worker, and this depends on a host of issues, including the education status of the labour force.

Similarly, it could be argued that if there are excess qualified graduates in the labour market then the local organizations may suffer, as the tendency might be that very qualified graduates will seek employment with foreign firms. Interestingly, there are Saudi Arabian government policies such as Saudisation which purport to ensure that both private and public firms give priority to Saudi nationals before turning to foreign female workers (Fakeeh, 2009).

As earlier discussed in the literature review (Sections 3.3 and 3.4, and specifically 3.3.2), some studies have shown that, indeed, the employment opportunities in Saudi Arabia fluctuate along the lines of gender preferences and the country of origin of the person. Thus, 85,000 foreign males were employed in 2009 compared to 147,000 Saudi males and 12,000 Saudi females. A great proportion of the female workforce went into the education sector, (at 77%), and to the healthcare sector (at 11%), and organizational administration (at 6%). There was a decline in the employment of foreign females, which implies that Saudi females were taking up more of these opportunities. Consequently, about 53,000 foreign females were employed in Saudi, mostly in the domestic social service areas, with data further showing that 88% were in private homes (ILO, 2010).

In the review of the Saudisation policy, the literature has offered some theories as to why foreign multinationals are more likely to employ Saudi female graduates than local firms (SAMBA, 2000; Alsheikh, 2015). Among these is the neoclassical theory, which other than believing in a free labour market for supply and demand, also shows that foreign firms offer higher rewards and remuneration compared to locals, which arguably prejudices the position of female workers.

In fact, foreign multinationals have little or no discriminatory practices concerning graduate skills and experience in work as long as they can penetrate the local market. The neoclassical theory also supports equal employee motivation and assures all of job security (Kirton and Green, 2010).

The next theory is labour market segmentation. In this case, foreign firms believe that both genders play an important role in the labour market as long as they are well paid and their work conditions are maintained and problems resolved. Therefore, this theory arguably holds the most appropriate way to control employee mobility and manage their morale and train them to fix skills gaps. Furthermore, this theory recognises the role of workers' unions and collective bargaining to deliberate whenever conflict arises (Jenkins, 2004). This is when the Saudi Arabian labour market needs more input now as the female graduates feel the avenues for addressing their problems are narrow.

The third explanation for the foreign multinational preference for Saudi female graduates is in the theory of the dual labour market. This theory exists in labour markets with high attrition of employees. Employee commitment is wanting and firms often have to pay out hefty amounts to part time workers rather than long-term rewards and associated allowances (Saint-Paul, 1996). These are typical characteristics of foreign multinationals operating in Saudi Arabia and most of them have no problem working with female graduates.

Interestingly, the sentiment around Saudisation is not new. The same philosophy pertains in many countries. For example, a former UK Labour Prime Minister (Gordon Brown) in the Labour Annual Conference of September 2007, said he “wanted Britain to be a world leader in sciences, business, creativity and manufacturing, and that the government would be drawing on the talents of all to create British jobs for British workers”.

Having analysed how policy influences the current workforce market and the potential lines of action that could lead to improvement, the discussions in the next section focus on the extent to which respondents share and buy into the assumed expectations of the government in terms of the outcomes of policy interventions in the labour market.

### **6.3.2 Expectations from the government**

Analysis of respondents' expectations of the government is relevant as it helps understand the areas in the current workforce context that need to be improved as well as revealing potential improvement strategies. The malfunctions of the current workforce system can be identified by reviewing the experience of those who have been searching for jobs and the experiences of current employees. In their responses to both the questionnaire and the interview, respondents have identified the weaknesses of the current system as well as pointed out their expectations of the government.

As mentioned elsewhere, the study also sought to establish the views of respondents to the questionnaires on what their expectations are with regard to the government and other authorities with respect to the unemployment situation for female graduates in Saudi Arabia. To this end, the respondents were asked to offer their views on their level of agreement with the statement: I believe that the Saudi government needs to do more to encourage firms to find ways to employ female graduates.

Table 6.3.5a presents the views of the respondents to the question regarding the potential implications for increased government support for employment of female graduates.

TABLE 6.3.5A GOVERNMENT'S INFLUENCE ON FIRMS TO EMPLOY FEMALE GRADUATES

Variable Group	Group Panel					Frequency (valid)	% (Valid)	Mean	Standard Deviation
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed				
Disagree Strongly	0	0	3	11	20	34	2.5	4.5730	0.82974
Disagree Slightly	1	0	0	3	5	9	0.7		
Neutral	9	4	14	4	36	67	5.0		
Agree Slightly	39	33	52	67	89	280	20.8		
Agree Strongly	145	121	114	238	340	958	71.0		
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100		

As the data presented in Table 6.3.5a indicates, 91.8% of the respondents expressed their agreement with the statement that; “Government needs to do more to encourage firms to find ways to employ female graduates”, with 71% reporting strong agreement and 20.8% agreeing. Only 5% and 3.2% respectively reported neutrality and disagreement with the statement. The mean value of 4.5730 confirms the validity of the majority agreement.

TABLE 6.3.5B: KW TEST ON GOVERNMENT'S INFLUENCE ON FIRMS TO EMPLOY FEMALE GRADUATES

Group (Control Variables)	Group Categories	Mean Rank	Test	Asymp. Sig. (p)
Company	A B C Local Government Unemployed	707.32 720.15 619.01 694.56 655.59	KW Test	.005*
Age	18-24 25-34 35-44 45-60	626.44 683.37 681.41 763.82	KW Test	.018*
Place of study	Graduated in Saudi-Arabia Graduated abroad	665.23 747.08	KW Test	0.002*
Degree Qualification	Engineering Health Medicine Education Languages Business Studies Marketing Human Resources Creative Arts Media Computer/IT Law Other	628.24 685.49 686.49 685.05 695.03 663.17 620.55 684.03 513.49 560.00 250.50	KW Test	.002*
Level of Degree Education	High school Diploma Bachelor Master	637.38 674.10 658.50 749.73	KW Test	.001*
Type of Firm	None A Saudi Firm Multinational Firm	627.58 711.45 632.74	KW Test	.000*
Employment Sector	Private Public None	702.35 679.93 631.22	KW Test	.000*
Type of Employment	Full-Time Part-Time Flexible None	627.58 628.59 701.18 813.23	KW Test	.000*
Period to gaining employment	One Month or Less Two to Three Month Four to Six Month Seven to Twelve Month Twelve month to two years Three years to five years Five years to seven years Seven years to nine years From nine years and more	569.16 691.65 695.86 699.48 724.52 619.22 531.40 620.54 753.95	KW Test	.000*

Note: (\*) Statistically significant at 5% level; (\*\*) Statistically significant at 10%

Table 6.3.5b examines the significance of control variables on the notion that “The government needs to do more to encourage firms to find ways to employ female graduates”. The control variables are statistically significant at a significance level of 5%, with their estimated *p*-value below 0.05, thus denoting key differences between the responses directed at these control variables. The ranking of mean values varies between different group categories pertaining to the same control variable. For example, in the case of “Type of employment”, the mean rank of 627.58 shows that female graduates working full-time have expressed a significantly different opinion from those working on a flexible schedule (701.18).

Having presented their opinions on the potential implications of government involvement in influencing firms to hire female graduates, the respondents were also asked to offer their level of agreement to the following statement: I think that the education system, led by the Ministry of Higher Education, should do more to inform female graduates and prospective graduates of the way that more flexible working practices can aid them in entering the labour market. Again, as evident in the findings presented in Table 6.3.6a, a significant (88.0%) proportion of respondents either slightly or strongly agreed with the statement.

TABLE 6.3.6A: VIEWS OF PARTICIPANT ON THE MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION GUIDANCE ON FLEXIBLE WORKING PRACTICES

Variable Group	Group Panel					Frequency (valid)	% (Valid)	Mean	Standard Deviation
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed				
Disagree Strongly	4	0	0	0	4	8	.6	4.4507	0.79593
Disagree Slightly	1	3	3	0	22	29	2.1		
Neutral	27	14	28	22	34	125	9.3		
Agree Slightly	49	31	71	58	163	372	27.6		
Agree Strongly	114	110	81	243	267	815	60.4		
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100		

As mentioned above, 88% of those questioned indicated that they agree with the statement that the Ministry should do more to inform female graduates and potential graduates about the advantages of flexible employment for labour market entry. The number of those who displayed strong agreement proved to be higher than those who agreed slightly, the former representing 60.4% of the total number of respondents, while the latter represented 27.6%. Only 2.7% expressed disagreement with the statement, while 9.3% remained neutral. The mean rank of 4.4507 indicates the clear tendency for agreement of the majority of respondents.

Similarly, referring to an equally relevant political aspect, the respondents were also asked to offer their level of agreement with the following statement: “I think that the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education should collaborate on developing policies to encourage firms to adopt more flexible working practices so that the skills of female graduates can be used in the market place and boost the economy of the country”.

Almost 94% of respondents were in agreement with this statement. Again, this further reinforces the position that concerted efforts need to be levelled at improving the employment situation of female graduates, and that joined-up thinking by the relevant authorities is welcome and important.

Table 6.3.6b examines the significance of control variables on the proposition that “system, led by the Ministry of Higher Education, should do more to inform female graduates and prospective graduates of the way that more flexible working practices can aid them in entering the labour market”.

TABLE 6.3.6B KW TEST ON VIEWS OF PARTICIPANT ON THE MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION GUIDANCE ON FLEXIBLE WORKING PRACTICES

Group (Control Variables)	Group Categories	Mean Rank	Test	Asymp. Sig. (p)
Company	A B C Local Government Unemployed	652.34 733.50 567.84 778.08 637.23	KW Test	.000*
Degree Qualification	Engineering Health Medicine Education Languages Business Studies Marketing Human Resources Creative Arts Media Computer/IT Law Other	688.03 660.84 708.48 658.07 634.84 644.98 696.81 709.69 597.84 942.00 348.50	KW Test	.018*
Type of Firm	None A Saudi Firm Multinational Firm	644.06 719.85 571.08	KW Test	.000*
Employment Sector	Private Public None	724.53 638.32 639.61	KW Test	.000*
Type of Employment	Full-Time Part-Time Flexible None	644.06 642.78 695.02 559.09	KW Test	.038*
Period to gaining employment	One Month or Less Two to Three Month Four to Six Month Seven to Twelve Month Twelve months to two years Three years to five years Five years to seven years Seven years to nine years From nine years and more	659.70 725.24 677.32 650.57 735.94 545.03 655.24 620.40 693.39	KW Test	.000*

Note: (\*) Statistically significant at 5% level; (\*\*) Statistically significant at 10%

Table 6.3.6b presents statistical evidence which supports the proposition that the Ministry of Higher Education needs to do more to inform female graduates and prospective graduates of the way that more flexible working practices can aid their labour market entry. However, all control variables' p-values are below 0.05, implying that those pertaining to different group categories do not share the same opinion in relation to the statement evaluated in by Table 6.3.6b.



The ranking of mean values varies between different group categories pertaining to the same control variable. For example, in the case of Degree qualification, the mean rank of 597.84 shows that those with a degree in computers/IT have expressed a significantly different opinion from those with a degree in creative arts media (709.69) or from those with a degree in education (708.48).

After analysing whether they believe that there are measures through which the government could offer direct support to female graduates to secure employment, the participants in the survey were questioned about the potential for collaboration between the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education. The respondents' answers are presented in Table 6.3.7a.

TABLE 6.3.7A: LABOUR AND EDUCATION MINISTRIES' INFLUENCE ON DEVELOPING MORE FLEXIBLE WORKING PRACTICES

Variable Group	Group Panel					Frequency (valid)	% (Valid)	Mean	Standard Deviation
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed				
Disagree Strongly	1	0	0	0	7	8	.6	4.6842	0.66016
Disagree Slightly	1	7	0	0	5	13	1.0		
Neutral	13	0	14	3	31	61	4.5		
Agree Slightly	31	23	61	40	78	233	17.3		
Agree Strongly	149	128	108	280	369	1034	76.6		
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100		

As can be seen from the table, 93.9% of those questioned indicated that they agree that the two Ministries should collaborate to develop policies that will encourage firms to offer flexible employment. The number of those who displayed strong agreement proved to be higher than those who agreed slightly, the former representing 76.6% of the total number of respondents, while the latter represented 17.3%. Only 1.6% expressed disagreement with the statement, while 4.5% remained neutral. The mean rank of 4.6842 clearly indicates the agreement of the majority of respondents.

Table 6.3.7b provides a statistical presentation to the statement “The Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education should collaborate on developing policies to encourage firms to adopt more flexible working practices so that the skills of female graduates can be used in the market place and boost the economy of the country”.

TABLE 6.3.7B: KW TEST ON LABOUR AND EDUCATION MINISTRIES’ INFLUENCE ON DEVELOPING MORE FLEXIBLE WORKING PRACTICES

Group (Control Variables)	Group Categories	Mean Rank	Test	Asymp. Sig. (p)
Company	A	671.32	KW Test	.000*
	B	704.06		
	C	561.62		
	Local Government	746.80		
	Unemployed	662.11		
Degree Qualification	Engineering	626.62	KW Test	.000*
	Health Medicine	677.77		
	Education	708.97		
	Languages	673.04		
	Business Studies	635.72		
	Marketing	563.83		
	Human Resources	724.67		
	Creative Arts Media	679.20		
	Computer/IT	639.33		
	Law	832.50		
	Other	199.00		
Type of Firm	None	663.03	KW Test	.000*
	A Saudi Firm	712.27		
	Multinational Firm	562.64		
Employment Sector	Private	716.16	KW Test	.000*
	Public	633.67		
	None	656.03		
Period to gaining employment	One Month or Less	646.49	KW Test	.003*
	Two to Three Months	668.24		
	Four to Six Months	696.24		
	Seven to Twelve Months	671.02		
	Twelve months to two years	707.88		
	Three years to five years	584.65		
	Five years to seven years	767.86		
	Seven years to nine years	659.88		
	From nine years and more	680.46		

Note: (\*) Statistically significant at 5% level; (\*\*) Statistically significant at 10%

All control variables are statistically significant at 5% significance value, but, because their estimated p-values are below 0.05, it also indicates that different group categories do not share the same opinion in relation to the statement. The ranking of mean values varies between different group categories pertaining to the same control variable. For example in the case of Period to gaining employment, the mean rank of 707.88 shows that those who have spent twelve months to two years searching for employment have a significantly

different opinion from those who have spent less than six months searching for employment (for these group categories the mean ranks varying from 646.49 up to 696.24).

From the above, one could deduce that individuals and their organisations appear to be aware of some of the initiatives and efforts that the government is making towards improving female graduate employment. But there is evidence of the need for the government to do much more than is currently the case.

### **Employment of Female Graduates: Organisational and labour market roles of senior managers and the government**

The question as to whether respondents want greater commitment from senior managers and government to improving the employment situation of female graduates was investigated. In this respect, respondents were asked to express their levels of agreement regarding the degree to which they would like senior managers and the government to improve the employment opportunities of female graduates through flexible working initiatives. The findings show that almost 90% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would like to see improved initiatives in that direction. The respondents' answers in respect of this aspect are presented in Table 6.3.8a.

TABLE 6.3.8A: VIEWS ON POTENTIAL IMPROVED INITIATIVES FOR FLEXIBLE WORKING

Variable Group	Group Panel					Frequency (valid)	% (Valid)	Mean	Standard Deviation
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed				
Disagree Slightly	2	0	0	9	0	11	.8	4.5641	0.69424
Neutral	17	21	20	21	47	126	9.3		
Agree Slightly	31	24	71	65	112	303	22.5		
Agree Strongly	145	113	92	228	331	909	67.4		
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100		

As mentioned above, 90% of those questioned agreed that improved initiatives for flexible working practices from the government and employers' would be welcomed.

The number of those who displayed strong agreement proved to be higher than that of those who agreed slightly, the former representing 67.4% of the total number of respondents, while the latter represented 22.5% of the total number of respondents. Only .8% expressed disagreement with the statement, while 9.3% remained neutral. The mean rank of 4.5641 indicates the clear tendency for agreement of the majority of respondents, which is further confirmed by the KW test results presented in table 6.3.8b.

TABLE 6.3.8B: KW TEST ON VIEWS ON POTENTIAL IMPROVED INITIATIVES FOR FLEXIBLE WORKING

Group (Control Variables)	Group Categories	Mean Rank	Test	Asymp. Sig. (p)
Company	A B C Local Government Unemployed	718.01 693.90 570.21 694.93 677.78	KW Test	.000*
Age	18-24 25-34 35-44 45-60	602.87 677.26 712.04 823.74	KW Test	.000*
Degree Qualification	Engineering Health Medicine Education Languages Business Studies Marketing Human Resources Creative Arts Media Computer/IT Law Other	643.96 720.13 685.69 685.14 650.39 722.00 652.99 660.01 681.11 592.00 6.00	KW Test	.007*
Type of Firm	None A Saudi Firm Multinational Firm	649.76 706.72 607.87	KW Test	.000*
Employment Sector	Private Public None	708.73 656.85 644.32	KW Test	.000*
Type of Employment	Full-Time Part-Time Flexible None	649.76 728.15 677.91 839.91	KW Test	.041*
Period to gaining employment	One Month or Less Two to Three Months Four to Six Months Seven to Twelve Months Twelve months to two years Three years to five years Five years to seven years Seven years to nine years From nine years and more	584.91 682.61 687.02 653.47 689.71 697.71 749.44 698.08 738.12	KW Test	.008*

Note: (\*) Statistically significant at 5% level; (\*\*) Statistically significant at 10%

Table 6.3.8b examines the significance of control variables on the assertion that “improved initiatives for flexible working, both from the government and from employing organizations would be welcomed”. The control variables are statistically significant at a significance level of 5%, with an estimated p-value below 0.050, thus denoting differences between the responses directed at this control variable. For example, in the case of Age, the mean rank of 602.87 shows that those from 18-24 years old have a significantly different opinion from those from 35-44 (712.04) or from those between 45 and 60 (823.74).

### **Interviews**

The interviews enabled more in-depth questions to help understand the role that government plays in tackling female graduate employment. Those who partook in the semi-structured interviews were asked the following questions: Are you aware of the Saudi government’s views and policies in regard to tackling employment within Saudi Arabia in general and in relation to increasing female graduate employment particularly? What are your views on this: do you think the government needs more or less involvement in this area? These questions revealed some interesting comments and feedback from the interviewees. These are presented below.

In response to interview questions, the representatives of the Ministry of High Education indicated that they are convinced that the implementation of flexible working would help increase employment as long as it differentiates between jobs that allow this type of working pattern and jobs that do not. Otherwise, they are concerned that the inappropriate implementation of such measures might lead to poor performance. Furthermore, although they attested that increased effort would be necessary in order to reach this aim in light of current unemployment figures, they also pointed out that:

“Early indicators would suggest that these schemes helped to increase the employment of Saudi women in the private sector by 160 000 since the implementation of the royal and cabinet’s directives 121 and 120, two years ago”.

Furthermore, Ministry representatives also believed that achieving this effort would not be difficult to implement due to current technology, which contributes to making communication easy and thus offers accessible solutions for tackling the potential difficulties associated with this type of working pattern.

Accordingly, one of the Ministry representatives noted that “Flexible hours are suitable these days because technology is accessible and communication is made easy. Implementing flexible working will increase employment”. Furthermore, Ministry officials point out that the Ministry is strongly engaged in identifying solutions for increasing women graduates’ chances for employment. In this respect, they are oriented towards providing training placements as one of the main solutions. Hence, they say: “our Ministry is very particular on finding opportunities for female graduates or providing them training placements so that they can get full competence for the job market.” Accordingly, they claim the “Ministry aims at developing the professionalism and experience of graduates in light of job market exigencies.”

The Ministry’s opinion concerning the involvement of Saudi women in the economy and development of the country is consistent with that offered by most of the participants in the questionnaire survey. They describe the role of Saudi women in the economic and social development of the Kingdom as “vital” and argue this by highlighting the fact that the majority of Saudi graduates are female and, therefore: “involving Saudi women is vital in the development of the kingdom and according to statistics, 65% of university graduates are female, and finding them suitable and permanent jobs is the aim of the department.”

The Ministry of Labour's opinions concerning these issues were also sought. Asked whether the government should be involved in addressing unemployment among Saudi women graduates, its representatives began by outlining the measures already implemented by the government, emphasising that: "the government has changed a lot of policies to help and improve Saudi women's labour market situation". As an example of measures that have been taken to encourage the recruitment of women, some Ministry officials referred to labour law that "counted one woman to two Saudis." However, since that law no longer exists, interviews outlined existing measures such as the fact that "only Saudi females can work in women's lingerie stores; encouraging employing females as cashiers; easing regulations to encourage women to have their own businesses" as testimony to the Ministry's intention to support women's employment. However, interviewees also raised and discussed constraints, which, they claim, have prevented the Ministry from reaching a more accelerated rate of progress. In that regard, the representative noted:

"We still have a lot of constraints toward this and the government still need to overcome these constraints, if the Kingdom is to create a dynamic-market economy. Although in about 10 years we have managed to triple women's labour market participation rate, we still represent one of the lowest levels of national female participation in the regional labour force and according to official statistics, only 5.5% of the 4.7 million Saudi women (of working age) are actually employed. Also, trying to reduce the overall unemployment in Saudi because the employment of Saudi women is affected due to the high adult male unemployment in the economy, resulting in some Saudi men treating the women as rivals in the job market".

It is, however, important to observe that these constraints are considered and acknowledged by the interviewees representing the Ministry of Labour, a constant concern of the government and therefore a problem for which solutions are already sought.

The interviewees representing Company B Bank admitted they “are aware of government efforts to support female employment and all government directives were followed by top management here.” Despite confirming the proactive attitude of both the government and the Bank’s management, it is the “personal opinion” of the representatives of company B that more should be done to increase women’s chances to participate in the economic life of the country. In that respect, it should be:

“general policy that more vacancies be marked for women only both in the public and private sectors, and the Saudi woman began literally making her impact through her participation on the economic life and proved her worth. We hope to see more action from the state by monitoring, directing and promoting more employment of female graduates.”

The potential for implementation of flexible employment was regarded at Company B as a useful and opportune strategy to serve both the women in search for a job, as well as the company, as it would enable the latter to choose from a wider ensemble of professionals those who are best fitted for the company’s needs and standards. Accordingly, the view is that adoption of flexible employment will help “to widen the choices of different forms of employment will make it possible for us the bank to attract more people of the right calibre and background who would be useful for the business in the future.”

The general opinion reflected by the interviewees pertaining to Company B was that the government is already involved in solving the problem of Saudi graduate women’s unemployment and that this is a pertinent reaction on behalf of the state authorities.

For the unemployed, interview data shows reservations about current government strategies directed at reducing the rate of women’s unemployment. One of the interviewees admitted that although the state offers free education for women “from primary to university” it fails to establish a relevant correlation between the education provided and



the current demands of the labour market, thus enabling the redundancy of insufficiently or inappropriately qualified professionals. As the interviewee puts it: “I see no liaising between departments. For example; I see no coordinating actions between current demand for graduates in the job market and learning centres like vocational training centres, colleges and universities.” Also, the government’s efforts are considered to be based on preconceptions and therefore unable to support the construction of a balanced and non-discriminatory working environment. “The Saudi state’ the interviewee noted, ‘is keen to see Saudi women enter an islamically minded place of work where free mixing is banned as to preserve the integrity of the Saudi woman and also help her to discharge her duty in a stress free environment.”

Despite such religiously influenced convictions, a respondent also recognised that “presently there are directives which had been issued from our wise guardians to treat the Saudi woman with equality in the workplace as she has been given the equal rights to vote and to nominate herself as a member in the consultative council.” Not surprisingly, the unemployed present women’s contribution to the Saudi economy as deserving support, considering that this would be a rational measure justified by a logical and profitable use of resources. Thus, one interviewee argued that “the economy is to utilise the source which are available in the best manner and without doubt the human resource is the most valuable resource. Supporting Saudi female graduates is very crucial.” In spite of the reticence manifested towards the current state of affairs, the unemployed also seem hopeful about future employment prospects. Consequently, one of the interviewees claims that their “confidence is high and the reason for that is because of the new guidelines and directives which were issued to welcome the Saudi woman and to increase the percentage of women graduates in the workplace in order to take the country further into the future.”

For some of the unemployed interviewees, the problem is not the government or its policies, but rather, the problem of female unemployment is attributed to flaws in the implementation of the government guidelines and directives. In that regard, one interviewee remarks:

“The government as I see took the initiative in encouraging Saudi women to enter the labour market from what we observe from the government guidelines and directives. However, from what I can see the shortcoming stems from the services which are required to discharge these directives and guidelines and they are the ones responsible for blocking the entry of Saudi women into the labour market and taking part in prolonging their entry”.

The research findings from interviews also show that the unemployed regard women as holding great potential, and, therefore, as being valuable assets for the Saudi labour market. At times, this argument is made using their capacity for motherhood. Hence, “the Saudi woman who made countless generations of this great country can, and will make a difference to develop the country and make it great.” Following that line of argument, they contrasted women’s position with men and presented this as being subject to discrimination. In that regard, “unfortunately, equality between her and men is nonexistent in seeking work as I have mentioned before. Job opportunities for a man who carries the same qualifications as I have, are much greater.” A potential solution to the obvious inequality is presented in terms of positive discrimination involving establishing government offices that would only approve women’s applications to jobs. The proponent of this solution who claims: “my morale at this moment is not high”, also “feels that the best way forward is to establish government centres (offices) to recruit women.”

In clear contrast to the interviewee cited in preceding paragraph, the interviewee who is cited in this and the paragraph that follows displays optimism and confidence in the future employment prospects, arguing that “the kingdom now is going through an economic boom in all fields which makes one hopeful.”

It is interesting to notice that the majority of the unemployed those who agreed to be interviewed for this study describe the government’s support for Saudi women by referring to the educational facilities provided for them. In that regard, the following quotation is representative of the general view:

“The Saudi government did not waste any effort to develop avenues for working women. They always encouraged them. On the other hand, they always supported her in pursuing education inside the kingdom and abroad, and supported a bursary for her to study abroad so that she would challenge the best minds and excel so that she would help build the country.”

Helping women graduates to obtain employment is considered a vital action because it would both benefit the economy and could represent a profitable investment in the indigenous workforce, thus reducing the number of foreign workers. “It is’, therefore, very important to support women graduates to get employment because that will impact positively on Saudi economy and investment in indigenous labour of the country instead of hiring foreign labour coming from abroad”.

The interviewees from Company A share the common belief that the government’s involvement in tackling the problem of women unemployment is necessary. However, as different from those who belong to other groups, some of those from Company A assumed a more trenchant and less emotional attitude to the question about options for facilitating women’s access to jobs.

For example, one argues that “gender and nationality are not terms for hiring. Type of degree, GPA, and qualifications are more important factors”. He goes on to say:

“I don’t think there is a difference between male and female. I believe who ever deserves the job should get it regardless of the gender, and a female employee is no different than a male employee in terms of capability. I personally do not like to segregate in terms of the contribution or any other professional aspect between females and males. I believe the valuable contribution is not linked to a gender but to the willingness and capabilities of an individual.”

The issue of flexible employment is considered to be of a cultural nature and therefore it is regarded as a common and wider social responsibility and issue that exceeds the decisions of the companies’ management as well as their current or potential policies. Accordingly, “this concept would need to be incorporated into Saudi Arabia to be considered by our organization. It is also a cultural change which might take time to be applied or accepted as is the case with any new policy.” Some respondents attested that flexible employment is not characteristic to Company A, but argued that it should not be perceived as a main criterion in hiring women since there are other issues that prevent women from gaining access to jobs such as restrictions to areas of operations. Consequently, according to one interviewee, while flexible employment

“may help, I am not sure if the flexi hours is the issue or the type of work that is done. We receive a wide number of applicants, but the issue is whether they are hired in the first place. More than anything, the issue could be in restrictions to areas of operations rather than the female’s need for flexi time.”

Others, however, based on their personal experience, believe flexible employment would benefit all parties involved; the company, as employees would be able to work during the hours when they can contribute the most to its productivity and, the employees as they

would be able to manage both professional and personal responsibilities. As one interviewee puts it: “in my situation, being married, working during the morning hours where my productivity is at its maximum is a good opportunity. It allows me to manage my life better; it allows other ladies to have job opportunities.”

Although unable to formulate a clear definition of flexible employment, some of the interviewees describe the concept by referring to its purpose as seen from the employer’s perspective: Hence, one interviewee noted: “I’m not fully familiar with that term, but what I understand is that this term is related to the concept of having internal rules intended to help employees to be more productive and committed to work.” Company A’s understanding of flexible employment is described by interviewees as being related to their employees’ needs to balance their role as professionals with their role as mother and it is reduced to being seen as best reflected in the 10 weeks maternity leave offered. Thus, according to one of the interviewees:

“If flexible employment means flexible working hours and conditions, in our company, such practices are limited to female employees who are entitled to a feeding hour post the completion of maternity leave. The employee can reach an agreement with her supervisor to choose a suitable time for her child’s feeding hour. Some of them might combine the one hour lunch break and the feeding hour and elect to leave two hours earlier. A female employee is eligible for 30 days leave of absence with full pay when her husband dies. Added to that, she can take leave without pay to complete her Eddah period, which is equivalent to four months and ten days as per the Islamic Law. Other than this, working virtually from their houses is very rare”.

Flexible employment is also considered a means of stimulating women to apply for jobs. In that respect, some argue that adoption of flexible employment practices “will, for sure, open the gates to many females to apply and will motivate them to enter the workforce”.

One interviewee even estimated that “the number of female applicants will certainly increase even by more than 50% but the most tangible benefit of applying this strategy is reducing cost” and thinks that female employees will become more “committed to serving the company they are working for and can bring a different perspective on some issues”. She goes on to stress that “many female employees work very hard and contribute just as much, and sometimes more, to the company than their male colleagues, because many are driven by having something to prove”. In that regard, flexible working is viewed as: “a great motivator and incentive to encourage women to stay with the company during the years when they have a young family and they can then return to full-time employment later in their careers. Otherwise the skills and experience of many young women are lost to a company when they start a family.”

Although many of the interviews maintained a neutral tone and tried to be as objective as possible with their views throughout their discourse, some did not refrain from passionately expressing their views regarding the valuable contribution women employees would make to the work environment at Company A because of their assumed creative talents and innovative nature. For example, according to one interviewee, “they [women] would make valuable contributions since they would balance operations within the organization gender wise. Also, they would bring different capabilities and creative talents to their roles than males would and keep the business fresh and innovative.” In addition,

“the existence of female employment within the company is very essential and important, because the diverse insights can always drive better outcomes. Furthermore, their high sense of responsibility, which is considered to be reinforced by their formal education “will add a lot of value to the workplace because women, by nature, have high sense of responsibility let alone the graduated employees who are highly educated and are fully aware of the value of work.”

Other characteristics which are enumerated as being specific to women and therefore argued to qualify them as valuable employees are their ability to multitask, their commitment and their resistance to stress - reasons for which they viewed as women being:

“more committed to their personal careers, more focused in developing and maintaining long term careers, better able to handle the work stress, bear the load more than male employees and, by nature, better at multitasking, which is considered a vital and valuable business skill.”

Generally, interviewees representing company C share the common position that although “the government is generally supportive of improving the situation of female employment,” more can be done. Hence one of the interviewees describes a directive that imposes a minimum female staff level as a percentage within companies, as a possible solution. Another suggested several lines of “concrete actions as means of reducing the number of unemployed women including, introduction of new legislation and enforcing existing laws relating to, for example; maternity leave enhancement, remote working, laws against discrimination and harassment, female labour courts.” On the issue of flexible employment, one interviewee indicates transportation restrictions, cultural restrictions on work time and government rules on female working environment as some of the main obstacles preventing companies in Saudi Arabia from adopting this concept as a valid option. By posing it as a wider contextually dependent problem, flexible employment is once again described, as a socio-cultural issue that cannot be effectively addressed solely at organizational level.

Company C employees also generally believe that offer of flexible employment would be an incentive for women graduates to apply for jobs in the company. One interviewee is confident that:

“the options are coming one day, actually there were a discussion on Job sharing which are still going on with concerned businesses. Those options will definitely encourage more female graduates to join company C.”

The interviewee answering on behalf of the Council of Chambers argued that the government is highly involved in supporting female graduates to obtain jobs, providing them with the necessary support to create employment opportunities. She goes on to underscore what appears as the government’s long term strategy and commitment to help women become a significant participant to the country’s development and economy by stating:

“There is no doubt that the government is doing all it can in terms of empowering women in general, to strongly enter the workforce. The scholarships provided, the many national programs to help match jobseekers find jobs in the private sector. But, enough women seeking employment, we need more women creating employment opportunities. Which the government through its national entrepreneurship development also supports programs such as Riyadhha.”

When questioned about how vital it is for the Saudi economy and labour market that female graduates are assisted into employment and whether female graduates are treated the same as males, the Council of Chambers representative proposed a shift of responsibility. The idea formulated was that although political support is important and it should be granted, women should consider doing more themselves to increase their access to jobs and to reduce the preconceived difference between women and men employees. Accordingly, he argues that:

“there are many efforts to help. The rest is in the hands of the applicant. I still think the main support is from the applicant herself. If she knows how to market her skills and abilities as a brand, provide voluntary services, so people get to know



her level of professionalism, she will get more than just a job at a firm. She will be asked to be a part of a bigger picture. That is how I did it and if it worked for me it will work for others. If you want to be a part of the private sector you've got to see your skills and abilities as a product and you are joining a competition with other competitors. Provide free samples of your product. Introduce it to people in the most creative ways. Evaluate your product constantly, develop it, and brand it. Until you reach your goal. During which you must know that YOU, as a women, represent professional Saudi women, and Muslim women around the world. Keep this in mind anywhere you work in Saudi and outside of Saudi. When the employer learns about your brand, the gap from being a man or a woman is reduced but not yet eliminated.”

In respect to how the government designed measures are implemented, the interviewee answered that despite its commitment to achieve the objective of reducing women's unemployment, the government's initiatives are somewhat compromised by rush decisions, thus depicting insufficient coordination and cooperation between state authorities. In that regard, although “the government is keen and is pushing the employment of women to decrease women unemployment, through issuing decrees and rules, the implementation is not well done by some rush decisions taken by the Ministry of Labour and its Sister authorities, and some private companies.” To conclude, the interviewee pointed out that “the government is keen to support and encourage women employment and to identify and apply the means necessary to help reduce the rate of unemployment among Saudi women graduates”.

Crucially, some interviewees have a broader view of the problem of and solution to unemployment among female graduates that recognizes the wider social contextual factors which contribute to it and, as a result, must be addressed in order to deal with the problem

more effectively. This perspective on the problem is captured in an interview with a female employee of Company A, who stated that:

“The responsibility of having female graduates in the labour market lies with the society, the government and the private sector. Each has certain roles and expectations to ensure the smooth involvement of the female graduates and their contribution to the labour market. The flexible working practice is just one of the elements. Also there are some socio-economic aspects in a broader sense that impact this process.”

A closer observation of the data from different participating organisations seems to suggest that Company A is the least committed to employing female graduates. This is despite the fact that the government has spent significant resources in the education of Saudi females and the general acknowledgement that the mismatch between higher educational and professional attainment and the labour market opportunities for Saudi female graduates is a serious and important matter that can be addressed through continuous collaboration and communication between industry and government. Although the reason for this is not absolutely explicit from the data, one may infer that this may have to do with the fact that Company A is a totally indigenous organization and, therefore, managerial behaviour is much more influenced by tradition and religious edicts concerning gender and, particularly the role of women in economic activity (Crawley *et al.*, 2013; Ramady, 2010; Shalaby, 2008).

Also, a closer inspection of the data from “unemployed females” shows a very high level of agreement with the view that the government and senior management need to be committed to flexible working practices. This could be seen as further evidence of lack of commitment on the part of various organizations. The researcher shares the view that these issues could be partly overcome when female students in universities and places of higher

learning start by accessing internships so that by the time they graduate, various organizations will be more willing to employ them (Fakeeh, 2009).

### **Discussion:**

The answers provided by the interviewees and survey participants show that generally, Saudi citizens agree with the government's Saudisation agenda. The idea that companies should give priority to Saudi citizens over foreign workers in their hiring decisions is supported by the majority of those whose opinions were sought. Despite the aforementioned advantages which companies obtain by hiring foreign workers, including flexibility of workforce (Ramady, 2010) and low level of remuneration (UNDP, 2005b), there are a number of persuasive arguments for companies to hire indigenous workers. Among these is their socio-cultural background, which gives home-grown workers the advantage of better understanding context within which the companies conduct their business.

The provision of more opportunities for women in employment can also be discussed as an important part of the Saudisation process, because, as Abu-Nasr (2013) and Mahdi (2008) argue, the male population alone cannot account for a substantial increase in the percentage of labour participation of Saudi nationals. However, despite being part of a common problem of the unemployment of Saudi citizens in general (McDowall, 2012), women's unemployment is also regarded as an independent issue whose specificity derives from deeper socio-cultural precepts which can be followed throughout a historical trajectory rather than limited to a current economic context (Al-Fawzan, 2012; Booz & Co., 2010; Al-Dehailan, 2007). The fact that the problem of female labour unemployment is a historically and socially derived phenomenon lends credibility to aspects of the findings that take a wider social, political and economic view of the problem and how it can be more effectively addressed. Generally, it also makes it easier to understand the results in terms of respondents' expectations from the government in tackling this problem.

On the whole, together, the survey and interview results confirm that although the government has proved its commitment to supporting female graduates in their efforts to obtain jobs, there is still more to be done. The majority of the respondents indicated the investments made in women's education as one of the most visible actions undertaken by the government. This was considered an opportune strategy to help increase women's chances to gain access to the labour market and, as argued by others: for example, Yousif (2011); it has proved successful in reversing the previous situation of Saudi women from having the lowest levels of literacy to having one of the highest university level enrolments and attainment among comparable nations (ibid).

Although still considered insufficient by eighteen respondents, the government's investment in women's education is reflected as a beneficial catalyst and manifests itself in several ways in relation to the numbers and roles that women play in the workforce market. First, and very importantly, it seems to have acted as a necessary confirmation of women's ability to provide a useful and consistent contribution to the country's economic and social development. The results of the research indicate that the majority agrees (either strongly or slightly) that women are a valuable asset for the Saudi economy. Second, it has motivated women to adopt a proactive attitude in respect to personal and professional development and served as an incentive for women to confront the idiosyncrasies of a patriarchal society. All of these are consistent with Roudi-Fahimi and Moghadam's (2003) conclusions about the impact of increased levels of education among women in the Middle East and North Africa. Although they also acknowledge the fact that more needs to be done to improve the relative levels of women employment in comparison to men, they nevertheless, admit that "as women's educational attainment in MENA countries has increased, more women have moved into the job market" (ibid., p. 4).

The specific aspect of women's unemployment in terms of its historical and social nature that manifests in gender inequality is one of the reasons that motivates expectations from the government. The persisting discrepancies between men and women within Saudi society cannot be easily addressed without policy intervention and other auxiliary government support. The existing prejudice cannot be reduced only through reasonable arguments; therefore the guidelines and directives coming from state authorities are a necessary complement to reduce the inequality among male and female employees, which has led to defining Saudi women in an economical context as "a massively underutilized resource" (Abu-Nasr, 2013).

Having analysed the common expectations from the government, in the next section, the researcher proposes an in depth analysis of the actual and/or potential resources and options available to women to find jobs.

### **6.3.3 Women's pathways to finding jobs**

Analysing the options which women have to find jobs is important as it helps in understanding the common alternatives which Saudi women graduates consider when searching for employment. It also helps to highlight the difficulties they encounter and the compromises they are forced to make, which provides further evidence of the fact that it is difficult for Saudi women graduates to secure employment.

To access information about the ways in which Saudi women graduates find employment, respondents were asked whether during their search for jobs they signed on with temporary agencies to find short-term work rather than be unemployed. Table 6.3.9a presents the survey findings in relation to the statement as to whether they have signed with temporary agencies to find short-term work.

TABLE 6.3.9A: SHORT-TERM WORK THROUGH TEMPORARY AGENCIES INSTEAD OF UNEMPLOYMENT

Variable Group	Group Panel					Frequency (valid)	% (Valid)	Mean	Standard Deviation
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed				
Disagree Strongly	63	61	56	81	43	304	22.5	3.1379	1.46227
Disagree Slightly	7	24	17	39	42	129	9.6		
Neutral	51	26	40	47	149	313	23.2		
Agree Slightly	35	10	30	62	146	283	21.0		
Agree Strongly	39	37	40	94	110	320	23.7		
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100		

As indicated in the table, about 45% agreed slightly or strongly with this position and 32.1% either slightly or strongly disagreed. The mean rank of 3.1379 indicates that although those in agreement with the statement do not constitute a strong majority, the results of the analysis show that there is however a general tendency that points to agreement rather than disagreement or neutrality.

Table 6.3.9b examines the significance of control variables on the statement that “Prior to gaining my current position/during my search, I signed on with temporary agencies to find short-term work rather than be unemployed”.

TABLE 6.3.9B: KW TEST ON SHORT-TERM WORK THROUGH TEMPORARY AGENCIES INSTEAD OF UNEMPLOYMENT

Group (Control Variables)	Group Categories	Mean Rank	Test	Asymp. Sig. (p)
Company	A B C Local Government Unemployed	614.11 546.77 615.48 685.27 756.04	KW Test	.000*
Place of study	Graduated in Saudi-Arabia Graduated abroad	692.29 547.41	KW Test	0.000*
Degree Qualification	Engineering Health Medicine Education Languages Business Studies Marketing Human Resources Creative Arts Media Computer/IT Law Other	564.99 634.74 705.54 777.22 639.91 669.31 628.07 743.86 529.54 498.17 888.00	KW Test	.000*
Level of Degree Education	High school Diploma Bachelor Master	851.63 549.15 691.80 615.52	KW Test	.003*
Type of Firm	None A Saudi Firm Multinational Firm	748.25 652.08 619.34	KW Test	.000*
Employment Sector	Private Public None	673.10 599.51 750.35	KW Test	.000*
Type of Employment	Full-Time Part-Time Flexible None	748.25 628.30 643.87 891.95	KW Test	.000*
Period to gaining employment	One Month or Less Two to Three Months Four to Six Months Seven to Twelve Months Twelve months to two years Three years to five years Five years to seven years Seven years to nine years From nine years and more	514.85 610.77 520.11 740.93 779.06 752.72 738.97 566.45 812.73	KW Test	.000*

Note: (\*) Statistically significant at 5% level; (\*\*) Statistically significant at 10%

All control variables are statistically significant at 5% significance value, as their estimated p-values are below 0.05, implying that those pertaining to different group categories do not share the same opinion in relation to the statement evaluated by Table 6.3.2b.

The ranking of mean values varies between different group categories pertaining to the same control variable. For example, in the case of the Employment sector, the mean rank

of 673.10 shows that those working in the private sector have expressed a significantly different opinion from those working in the public sector (599.51).

Following the analysis and presentation of data about women graduates' attitudes toward potential alternatives to unemployment in terms of whether or not they have considered temporary agency work, the researcher considered it relevant to continue to investigate the respondents' attitude towards other potential options which women graduates could or might have considered. Thus, respondents were asked if they had considered employment in areas outside their academic or professional disciplines. The responses, which are presented in Table 6.3.10a, show that 66.5% slightly or strongly agreed that this was the case and only 19.5% disagreed strongly with this position.

TABLE 6.3.10A: JOB APPLICATIONS OUTSIDE GRADUATE STUDY AREA TO ENTER THE LABOUR MARKET

Variable Group	Group Panel					Frequency (valid)	% (Valid)	Mean	Standard Deviation
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed				
Disagree Strongly	55	38	32	83	55	263	19.5	3.6516	1.53405
Disagree Slightly	8	17	21	17	5	68	5.0		
Neutral	23	14	15	22	47	121	9.0		
Agree Slightly	49	46	45	67	114	321	23.8		
Agree Strongly	60	43	70	134	269	576	42.7		
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100		

The mean rank 3.6516 indicated in Table 6.3.10a attests that although there is no strong majority to display agreement with the statement, there is however a tendency that points to agreement rather than disagreement or neutrality

Table 6.3.10b examines the significance of control variables on the statement that “I applied for jobs outside my graduate study area so that I could enter the labour market”.



TABLE 6.3.10B: KW TEST ON JOB APPLICATIONS OUTSIDE GRADUATE STUDY AREA TO ENTER THE LABOUR MARKET

Group (Control Variables)	Group Categories	Mean Rank	Test	Asymp. Sig. (p)
Company	A B C Local Government Unemployed	576.32 565.85 646.13 643.81 780.81	KW Test	.000*
Age	18-24 25-34 35-44 45-60	672.48 692.10 619.58 721.76	KW Test	.039*
Place of study	Graduated in Saudi-Arabia Graduated abroad	694.88 528.29	KW Test	0.000*
Degree Qualification	Engineering Health Medicine Education Languages Business Studies Marketing Human Resources Creative Arts Media Computer/IT Law Other	504.44 590.09 725.63 781.94 626.73 572.78 553.66 761.00 690.03 441.83 613.00	KW Test	.000*
Level of Degree Education	High school Diploma Bachelor Master	781.19 588.90 694.08 601.09	KW Test	.002*
Type of Firm	None A Saudi Firm Multinational Firm	753.92 641.48 647.00	KW Test	.000*
Employment Sector	Private Public None	649.51 633.00 751.79	KW Test	.000*
Type of Employment	Full-Time Part-Time Flexible None	753.92 505.24 657.28 851.73	KW Test	.000*
Period to gaining employment	One Month or Less Two to Three Months Four to Six Months Seven to Twelve Months Twelve months to two years Three years to five years Five years to seven years Seven years to nine years From nine years and more	410.01 580.31 606.76 730.13 769.81 864.24 753.21 711.54 688.49	KW Test	.000*

Note: (\*) Statistically significant at 5% level; (\*\*) Statistically significant at 10

All control variables are statistically significant at 5% significance value, as their estimated p-values are below 0.05, implying that those belonging to different group categories do not share the same opinion in relation to the statement evaluated by Table 6.3.10b.

The ranking of mean values varies between different group categories pertaining to the same control variable. For example, in the case of ‘Degree qualification’, the mean rank of 725.63 shows that those with a degree in education have expressed a significantly different opinion from those with a degree in engineering (504.44) or from those who have a degree in law (441.83). In addition to and following investigation as to whether female graduates have considered applying for jobs outside their graduate study area; the views of the respondents to the questionnaire were sought on whether Saudi Arabian women with higher levels of education (and qualifications) are likely to find it easier to obtain employment than those with lower levels of education/qualifications. Accordingly, Table 6.3.11a presents respondents’ views on the relation between women’s level of education and their chances to be employed.

TABLE 6.3.11A: RELATION BETWEEN LEVEL OF EDUCATION AND LIKELIHOOD OF GETTING A JOB

Variable Group	Group Panel					Frequency (valid)	% (Valid)	Mean	Standard Deviation
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed				
Disagree Strongly	0	0	3	1	0	4	.3	4.5856	0.69726
Disagree Slightly	3	1	2	1	2	9	.7		
Neutral	24	3	12	26	48	113	8.4		
Agree Slightly	65	24	29	65	107	290	21.4		
Agree Strongly	103	130	137	230	333	933	69.2		
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100		

90.6% of those who participated in the questionnaire survey noted that they agreed or strongly agreed with that viewpoint. The mean rank of 4.5856 indicated in Table 6.3.11a confirms that a strong majority agree that there is a positive correlation between women’s level of education and their employment opportunities. The number of those who displayed strong agreement proved to be higher than those who agreed slightly, the former representing 69.2% of the total number of respondents, while the latter represented 21.5%. Only 1% expressed disagreement with the statement, while 8.4% remained neutral. The KW test results presented in Table 6.3.8b confirm this conclusion.

In Chapter One of this thesis, a hypothesis was documented that a relationship exists between the level of education which women in Saudi Arabia have achieved, and the relative ease of gaining employment in the labour market. In this study, respondents to the questionnaire were asked to volunteer their views regarding the extent to which they agree with the statement that Saudi Arabian women with higher levels of education (and qualifications) are likely to find it easier to obtain employment than those with lower levels of education/qualifications. Statistically, by employing the Kruskal Wallis test, this hypothesis is supported (See Table 6.3.11b).

TABLE 6.3.11B: KW TEST ON RELATION BETWEEN LEVEL OF EDUCATION AND LIKELIHOOD OF GETTING A JOB

Group (Control Variables)	Group Categories	Mean Rank	Test	Asymp. Sig. (p)
Company	A B C Local Government Unemployed	565.66 769.15 708.80 689.07 666.26	KW Test	.000*
Degree Qualification	Engineering Health Medicine Education Languages Business Studies Marketing Human Resources Creative Arts Media Computer/IT Law Other	548.22 652.30 678.15 671.69 686.77 679.17 644.67 636.75 820.33 475.33 883.00	KW Test	.006*
Period to gaining employment	One Month or Less Two to Three Months Four to Six Months Seven to Twelve Months Twelve months to two years Three years to five years Five years to seven years Seven years to nine years From nine years and more	620.94 707.24 692.70 696.00 678.77 594.34 662.77 751.42 668.51	KW Test	.015*
Type of Firm	None A Saudi Firm Multinational Firm	657.79 680.49 687.71	KW Test	.005*
Employment Sector	Private Public None	654.08 722.50 659.14	KW Test	.002*

Note: (\*) Statistically significant at 5% level; (\*\*) Statistically significant at 10%

As can be observed in Table 6.3.11b, all control variables are statistically significant at 5% significance value, as their estimated p-values are below 0.05, implying that those belonging to different group categories do not share the same opinion in relation to the statement evaluated by Table 6.3.2b. The ranking of mean values varies between different group categories pertaining to the same control variable. For example, in the case of “Employment sector”, the mean rank of 654.08 shows that those working in the private sector have expressed a significantly different opinion from those working in the public sector (722.50).

### **Interviews**

As in the preceding sections, the findings from the interviews in relation to questions/statements raised under 6.3.3 are also presented in relation to different panel categories. Thus, interviewees are referred to in terms of the respective organisations or panel categories they ‘represent’.

Most of the representatives of Company B who agreed to be interviewed indicated that they were not aware of the percentage of graduate women applying for jobs in their organisations. Those who tried to answer the question provided approximate numbers that ranged from “approximately 32% and 10% last year”, thus indicating their inability to provide an accurate quantification and, instead, the tendency to base their perception on guesses and, worse still, invalid assumptions. It was considered important to review this aspect because studies have attested that the number of female graduates is currently higher than that of male graduates (UNDP, 2005a) and therefore it would be expected that this be reflected in the number of job applications submitted by each gender category. However, it can be observed that despite the fact that females make up the majority of university graduates, women are still perceived as a minority within the labour market. Nevertheless, some of the interviewees at Company B suggest that there is some gender parity.

In that regard, according to one, “the numbers (data) are not available, but I work in an office where there are ladies working in equal measure and there is no objection to that in the legal framework”.

The company’s representatives were also asked to indicate if temporary agencies are used to recruit staff on a short term basis. The question aimed to verify whether this would be a valid option for women searching for employment in the company, since many of the participants in the survey have indicated that they considered this a possible solution to unemployment.

The interviewees’ answers were inconsistent. Some were vague in indicating this sort of collaboration with agencies and “outsourcing locally” as well as “using agencies abroad for hiring Expats”. Others, however, denied that the company uses agencies, saying, “at the moment we do not use any temporary agencies to hire employees.” There were also respondents who were able to provide examples of jobs for which the bank considers working with temporary agencies to recruit staff on a short term basis. One interviewee asserted:

“Yes, this method of work you find in telesales services in banks and some businesses which hire people (i.e. part time or agency) work. You can find some others on flexible hours who contract to work for foreign companies to do domestic jobs and people were people were put on flexi contract as and when they are needed but the practice is very small and the scale of this kind of practice is minimal.”

The answers of the interviewees with respect to whether they would consider temporary or short-term contracts or applying for jobs outside their study area as opposed to remaining unemployed, are consistent with those of the survey respondents.

All participants attested that they found both alternatives preferable to unemployment and indicated that they would have considered making these compromises as a way of gaining experience and progressing their careers. As one interviewee put it:

“I see nothing wrong in that if it gives me security of employment and promotion or an alternative career and the work environment is both stimulating and challenging. I think it is very useful for Saudi women to take part in recruitment agencies as recruiting staff because that will help women graduates understand the workings and requirements of the labour market and many different avenues and ways to enter.”

When discussing the potential implications of the cultural and religious context on women's options for being employed, the interviewees generally argue that there are social and moral requirements that define the limits of the Saudi working woman and that women's employment issues should be interpreted within the precepts of the Islamic religion, which, as one interviewee put it, “encourages people to work and there are no religious objections to work”. However, the same interviewee then goes to elaborate, rather ambiguously, as follows:

“There are social requirements which are borne out of social customs and moral ethics which are well established and are related to how and what is acceptable for the Saudi working woman. But the religion of Islam always calls and encourages work and endeavour. There are cultural ethics and I do not think they are «religious» but this is to do with the way society operates, and feels safe and comfortable to operate, and the common Arab custom on which Islamic faith was built on which, incidentally encourages work and productivity.”

The representatives of Company A were as ignorant as those from Company B about the percentage of women's applications for jobs.

Most of them indicated that they are not aware of the actual numbers, some estimated that women's applications have risen to almost 50% of the total number of applications and one of the interviewees estimates the percentage to be 15%, but also admits that they are "not sure but would say about 15% judging by the applicants I have personally interviewed." Again, just like Company B, some Company A interviewees also indicated that, based on their experience, there are departments where the number of women employees is significantly high. For example; one interviewee claims that "a large percentage of employees in the public relations department" where they work, "are females". He goes on to say that "this includes females in all areas of the department including; leadership roles, supervisory roles, publishing/ writing roles, branding/marketing, relations roles, support services and more." It could be inferred from this evidence that there exists a gender-based segregation of employees according to the type of activity associated with each job.

The interviewees from Company A were not consistent in their answers in respect to whether the company uses temporary agencies to recruit staff on a short-term basis. However, the inconsistencies can be associated with lack of access to the relevant information. Despite the different opinions expressed, the majority indicated that the organisation does resort to such agencies, with one interviewee saying: "Yes, we do so through contracting companies, I am sure that agencies are utilized. Yes our company uses temporary agencies to recruit staff on a short term basis and there is a unit that handles Supplemental Manpower Procurement." This statement can be taken to imply that Company A is one of the companies to offer women real alternatives to full-time employment in their search for jobs.

Furthermore, some interviewees perceive it as a mutually beneficial alternative for both employees and employers. Hence, one interviewee believes

“It is always a good idea to have use agencies because they can facilitate linking employers to proper candidates and vice versa. It gives the receiving organizations the opportunity to assess employees’ competencies and skills before making the decision to convert their employment status to full-time regular employees”.

At company C, the percentage of job applications submitted by women is estimated within the interval 35% to 50%. Using temporary agencies to recruit staff on a short-term basis is considered a viable solution for the company as it provides the chance to properly evaluate the professionals interested in working in the company, before considering them for full-time positions.

These views are supported by one of the interviewees, who affirms: “Yes we do utilize [them] and most of our workforce started as agency workers on a full time job. If the staff show outstanding performance within a period of time they will be transferred as full time staff in the organisation.” This approach is also considered a precautionary measure through which the distance between skills acquired (by the employees) and skills requested (by the employer) is addressed. Accordingly, “due to the shortages of Saudi male/female skilled candidates within the market, employment agencies do their part to get the required resources as per the organisation’s needs.”

The answers of the interviewees representing the Council of Saudi Chambers reflect more of personal experience than the Council’s policy. Similar to the opinions of interviewees of other panel categories already presented, the views of the Council representative suggests that securing employment is more a question of personal responsibility and engagement. Consequently, referring to the interview questions, the interviewee remarks:



“Question 4 makes it sounds like submitting an application is the way to get jobs in Saudi Arabia. This is not the case at all. You do fill in applications for your first job, when you don’t have experience and/or you are not employed. However, once you start work and network, and people see the level of your brand of skills and abilities, they offer you jobs. I would say especially for women who possess a high level of professionalism and social intelligence.”

Alternatives to full-time employment are presented as beneficial for increasing one’s prospects to obtain a job, as are any attempts directed at enriching one’s professional skills and experience.

## **Discussion**

The aim of this section is to assess and discuss the options currently considered by Saudi women in their search for employment. The main trends discussed previously in respect to women’s employment in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are reflected in the responses of research participants to relevant questions and statements about ‘women’s ways of finding employment’. One of the trends identified by Kattan (1991) as affecting the policies developed by the government in its efforts to support women’s employment is the wider social and cultural view that women’s work should be limited to the home. In terms of current attitudes towards women in employment, although clearly less conservative, this view is still expressed and, paradoxically, presented as an argument for flexible employment to be made available for women.

The second trend referred to women’s right to work, but within the limits of their social status. As such, women can take up waged employment provided that the jobs considered or offered do not contradict their feminine nature and/or, the precepts of Islam. The respondents’ answers attested the existence of gender segregation in accordance with the activity implied or actually involved in different jobs.

Besides an attempt to comply with the traditional roles of Saudi women and despite the government's constant pleading for the important role which women could play in the economy, there are still restrictions for women's employment imposed by the law enforced (for example, the 2006 Saudi labour code which underlines the Sharia code according to which women's work should be consistent with nature and characteristics of their gender as defined by Islam) or by other social and cultural contextual circumstances (Alsheikh, 2015; Ramady, 2005, 2010), thus forcing women to struggle more in their efforts to secure employment.

The alternative options considered by women as viable ways to enter the labour market are, to a certain extent, imposed by aforementioned cultural and religious restrictions, which shape the society's outlook at all levels.

However, the evidence of the appeal of flexible employment on the grounds of social gender concerns is not unique to Saudi Arabia. Evidence indicates that the vast majority of those in flexible employment in Britain are women (Kersley et al., 2006). Likewise, as in Britain and other developed economies as well as the Middle East, the results of the research attest that educated Saudi women are in the frontline of the struggle to tackle the individual setbacks they encounter in their search for employment and break the historical barriers which have denied equal labour market access to Saudi women in general.

As outlined in the introduction to the chapter, in addition to presenting the demographic profile of the research participants, this chapter reported, analysed and discussed the research findings in relation to labour market policy in general and, specifically, views on government expectations regarding the impact of current labour market policy and female graduates' labour market entry strategies and employment seeking behaviours. In that respect, the chapter also reported and discussed findings concerning the expectations of female graduate respondents' expectations of senior managers at the organisational level, and of the impact of public policy and government. As indicated, respondents' views on public policy focused on their takes on the Saudisation agenda and, in that respect, while there were some expressions of positive views, generally, respondents expressed frustration at the lack of compliance at organisational level and weak enforcement at government level.

With respect to expectations, while admitting the evident limitations of policy, the views of government representatives suggest that the government expects that, but the lack of co-operation from employers and the reluctance of female graduates to accept private sector employment, Saudisation policy could have greater impact on unemployment in general and, in particular, on the unemployment problems of female graduates.

For their part, in relation to policy and expectations about the impact of policy, while female graduates acknowledged the efforts of the government in the Saudisation initiative, they also attribute their employment situation to employers' reluctance and weak enforcement mechanism. The following chapter, Chapter 7, provides an in depth analysis of the data collected through both the questionnaire survey and through the semi structured interview will be conducted to illustrate the current outlook as regards to gender differentiation, female graduates' preferences and their disappointment in Saudi society.

## CHAPTER 7 : FINDINGS ON HRM AND LABOUR FLEXIBILITY

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### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

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In order to assess the potential of flexible employment policies and practices to address unemployment among Saudi female graduates and their limited labour market opportunities, the preceding chapter presented and discussed the data around three themes of public policy relating to the labour market. In particular, indigenisation policies, government expectations regarding those policies and whether the extent to which these expectations are consistent with the views of respondents; and thirdly, women's job seeking strategies. In this regard, the data indicates some positive views about Saudisation, but also there are some outliers which express adverse views. It follows, therefore, that the findings also suggest some convergence between government and participants' views, but likewise, views that are critical of the impact of indigenisation policy. Accordingly, a significant number of respondents think that the government should do more to facilitate and improve the labour market situation of women graduates. With respect to women's job seeking strategies, the findings generally show that women are open to flexible practices as a means of labour market entry and, in that regard, see registration with temporary employment agencies as a credible pathway.

Overall, the aim of the current chapter is to analyse how the Saudi labour market reflects firms' HRM strategies and practices, and the relationship between different HRM approaches and labour market flexibility. In order to provide a coherent perspective on these, the discussion is structured around three main themes which seek to provide insight into a range of issues. The first theme concerns Saudi women's preferences. The discussion in relation to this theme seeks to explore how educated women perceive their chances of employment in Saudi Arabia and how they define their expectations.

The second theme relates to gender differentiation and seeks to highlight those areas of the current labour market that need to be addressed in order to help increase female labour market participation and employment opportunities. Following on from the second theme, the third and final theme focuses on the drawbacks of the current employment mechanism and practices in order to identify problems which need to be solved and to document the background information which will inform strategies to motivate women to become reliable, long-term members of the Saudi workforce and participants in the labour market. The final section of the chapter will draw on findings, which are presented in this chapter, as well as the preceding chapter (Chapter 6), to formulate conclusions emerging from the research.

As with Chapter 6, as much as possible, the implications of the findings for various stakeholders are often implied, but sometimes explicitly made in the discussions and conclusions. Employers' concerns for the cost of employing females for example have policy implications that require consideration and the willingness of female graduates to accept flexible employment options gives employers employment options that enable them to capture the potential of an increasing highly educated female population.

Before going into the data in terms of views on the core conceptual issues of flexibility and flexible employment practices and how they play out in the Saudi Arabian context, and, in particular, their implications for the unemployment problem among Saudi female graduates, it may be useful to provide a brief summary of some relevant key arguments that are highlighted in the literature chapters – in particular, Chapter 4. As Blyton and Turnbull (2004) and Procter and Ackroyd (2009) note in their analysis and frameworks of flexibility, the concept of flexibility in the context of employment is a vague concept which, even in the limited context of employment and HRM, operates at different levels; international, national and the workplace.

This vagueness has allowed for different and sometimes ambiguous arguments for what flexibility is, but particularly, what it is worth in the context of employment relations. To that end, advocates for flexible labour markets and flexible use of labour not only invoke organisational performance, but also a mutuality of benefit for employer and employees (CIPD, 2014a; Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2003; World Bank, 1993; Guest, 1987; Atkinson, 1984).

In this regard, advocates for flexible labour market and flexible use of labour have tended to revert to the neoliberal roots of the argument, which associate poor labour market performance to regulation and rigidity attributed to the role of actors such as trade unions (e.g. Hayek, 1984). Consequently, advocates like the World Bank, for example, use neoliberal arguments about the income depression effects of labour market regulation to urge governments to deregulate their labour markets and, therefore, create the enabling environment for introduction of flexible employment practices. In the context of HRM, the literature has drawn on Atkinson's flexible firm theory and Guest's (1987) framework of HRM, which identifies flexibility as a critical policy goal for organisational commitment and performance.

Such arguments for flexible labour markets and flexible use of labour within a predominantly neoliberal economic and political context have provided the enabling environment context for the proliferation of flexible use of labour (Kersley et al., 2004), or what opponents may describe as punitive trade union legislation and precarious atypical forms of employment (IPPR, 2014; in Bach, 2005; Legge, 2005). These forms of employment, seemingly taking the form outlined in Atkinson's (1984) framework in a range of forms of temporariness and casualization, are variously described as; part-time, agency, flexi-time, zero hour contracts, annualised hours etc. (Kersley et al., 2004, 2006).

While proponents see great merits in these forms of employment for employers (efficiency), they spin their arguments in terms and narratives such as ‘work-life balance’ and ‘family friendly’ to suggest that somehow there is a mutuality of benefits for both parties. For opponents, however, flexibility constitutes some of the most exploitative uses of labour (Legge, 2005; Procter and Ackroyd, 2009; Ward et al., 2001). While some critiques centre on the exploitative nature of flexibility in terms of work intensity, job and income insecurity (Legge, 2005; Blyton and Turnbull, 1992), others question the credibility of the efficiency argument. In their study of agency employment and annualised hours contracts, for example, Peck et al. (2005) note the dilemmas that managers face in managing agency workers whom they have little authority to discipline. They concluded that that of flexible use of labour is inefficient because Unilever ended up paying employees for time that they had not worked (ibid).

As can be gleaned from the findings that are reported in this chapter, whilst this study cannot claim to verify some of these theoretical positions, the findings are consistent with some of the theoretical issues that are summarised in the preceding paragraphs. For example, the findings reflect the lack of conceptual consensus, if not clarity as to what constitutes flexible employment. Similarly, respondents tend to make arguments about the utility of flexibility in terms of family friendly practice that will enable female graduates to juggle formal employment with their traditional roles as mothers and wives.

Firstly, one of the most salient statistics pertaining to employability in Saudi Arabia is that foreign multinationals have better retention trends than Saudi firms. On that data, it would seem logical to assume that foreign multinationals have better employment policies and better communication with their employees: hence the preference by many Saudis to work or engage with them (ILO, 2010).

An interesting observation worth documenting, however, is the issue of foreign workers taking up jobs in Saudi Arabia. Studies have shown that the overall labour participation in Saudi between 2006 and 2009 was approximately 50%, yet native Saudis account for only 36.4% of this number. Evidence indicates that the introduction of Saudisation has had some positive effect, with more Saudis able to obtain jobs previously held by foreign workers. Data based on estimates of issues of work visa by 2009 indicated that locals had taken back nearly 30% of jobs previously held by foreign workers. However, because foreign workers tend to be more active than Saudis, the overall labour force declined by 0.8% in 2009 (ILO, 2010).

The Saudi government encourages strong collaboration between local and foreign expert labour to improve the performance and management of both public and private institutions (KSA Ministry of Labour, 2009). This encouragement rests on the view that if a good mix of Saudi and foreign expertise is achieved, there will be better productivity and skills exposure for the entire national workforce (KSA Ministry of Labour, 2009). The Saudi government also encourages work in locally owned firms as a step towards “Saudisation” and development of indigenous calibre (OECD, 2011:2). One of the targets of the “Saudisation” policy of the labour market is women, who, for socio-cultural and religious reasons, are historically excluded from much of the formal labour market (Fakeeh, 2009; OECD, 2011).

Some of the effects of the policy in that regard are highlighted in the preceding chapters in terms of ways in which female graduates’ job-finding approaches were adapting to these policies. To elicit a wider understanding of views which elaborate on this, a number of questions were asked around female graduates’ preferences. The responses to these questions are documented and discussed in the section which follows.



As mentioned above, it is important to elucidate how educated women perceive their chances of employment in Saudi Arabia and how they define their expectations. One of the research questions posed in Chapter 1, Section 1.3, concerns “the nature of flexible forms of employment in Saudi Arabia, and the context’ in which “employers and employees” would “consider flexible employment”. Besides presenting relevant insight on how graduate Saudi women perceive their participation in the local labour market, the answers to this question, from the survey, are also useful for verifying the hypothesis about the association between regulation and poor economic performance (World Bank, 1993). That hypothesis argues that the rigidity of regulated labour markets results in poor economic performance and therefore suggests that flexible labour markets and flexible employment practices should be developed and adopted. Although it is not necessarily concerned with the relationship between flexible labour markets and economic performance in general, it is among the objectives of this study to examine and analyse whether flexible employment practices can positively affect the labour market participation of Saudi women, enhance development of the local economy through the employment of competent local workforce and, consequently, reduce local unemployment.

### **7.2.1 Should firms offer flexible employment?**

In the pursuit of these objectives, survey questions were complemented by interviewees to make more sense of the views of participants. First, as indicated and reported in Table 7.2.1a, survey respondents were asked whether firms in Saudi Arabia should consider offering flexible working patterns to female graduates to encourage them to enter and remain in the labour market.

TABLE 7.2.1A: SURVEY PARTICIPANTS' OPINIONS ON FLEXIBLE WORKING PATTERNS AS A MEAN TO REMAIN IN THE LABOUR MARKET BY OFFERING THEM.

Variable Group	Group Panel					Frequency (valid)	% (Valid)	Mean	Standard Deviation
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed				
Disagree Strongly	0	0	2	8	17	27	2.0	4.4559	0.84593
Disagree Slightly	3	9	0	0	14	26	1.9		
Neutral	9	5	16	22	21	73	5.4		
Agree Slightly	52	49	72	78	153	404	29.9		
Agree Strongly	131	95	93	215	285	819	60.8		
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100		

The findings presented above show that about 90% slightly or strongly agreed that firms in Saudi Arabia should consider offering flexible working patterns to female graduates to encourage them to enter and remain in the labour market. This result suggests an overwhelming desire for flexible working patterns as a potential solution to unemployment and the general poor labour market participation and status of female graduates.

The mean value of 4.4559 indicates that most of the participants displayed an agreement with the statement, and this pattern is ascertained by the KW test results presented in Table 7.2.1b. It can also be noted that neither the respondents representing Company A or Company B companies indicated strong disagreement with the affirmation and that more than 60% of the respondents pertaining to three (Company A, Company B, and Local Government) of the group panels displayed strong agreement.

TABLE 7.2.1B: KW TEST ON FLEXIBLE WORKING PATTERNS AS A MEAN TO REMAIN IN THE LABOUR MARKET BY OFFERING THEM.

Group (Control Variables)	Group Categories	Mean Rank	Test	Asymp. Sig. (p)
Company	A B C Local Government Unemployed	723.19 676.80 614.46 710.84 654.23	KW Test	.004*
Degree Qualification	Engineering Health, Medicine Education Languages Business Studies Marketing Human Resources Creative Arts Media Computer/IT Law Other	675.93 760.09 620.13 705.28 681.16 771.89 778.05 742.98 686.22 939.00 328.50	KW Test	.000*
Level of Degree Education	High school Diploma Bachelor Master	939.00 847.43 660.72 700.77	KW Test	.000*
Type of Firm	None Saudi Firm Multinational Firm	642.04 707.41 619.98	KW Test	.000*
Employment Sector	Public Private None	712.59 658.42 637.31	KW Test	.002*
Type of Employment	N/A Part-time Full-time Flexible working pattern	642.04 667.97 688.54 883.50	KW Test	.025*
Period to gaining Employment	One Month or Less Two to Three Months Four to Six Months Seven to Twelve Months Twelve months to two years Three years to five years Five years to seven years Seven years to nine years Nine years or more	646.86 683.88 664.64 724.04 747.95 584.06 423.15 565.87 670.38	KW Test	.000*

Note: (\*) Statistically significant at 5% level; (\*\*) Statistically significant at 10%

Table 7.2.1b shows that there is statistical evidence to suggest that females should be encouraged, through flexible employment patterns, to enter and remain in the labour market. The respondents provided similar answers, irrespective of the company, age, level of qualification and sector which they work in.

Moreover, it is also important to note that all control variables are statistically significant at 5% significance value, implying that those pertaining to different group categories do not share the same opinion in relation to the statement evaluated in Table 7.2.1b. The ranking of mean values varies between different group categories pertaining to the same control variable. For example, in the case of Degree qualification, the mean rank of 939 shows that those with a degree in law have expressed a significant different opinion from those with a degree in engineering (675.93), or from those who have a degree in education (620.13).

Similarly, when the issue of flexible working patterns was considered at a dis-aggregate level across the participating organizations, it could be noted that each of the groups either agreed slightly or agreed strongly with being offered more flexible working patterns. Less than 2% either disagreed slightly or strongly with the concept.

Despite the relative variation in responses and any possible ambiguity in respondents' understanding of flexibility, taken together, the findings presented in Tables 7.2.1a and 7.2.1b support, with little or no equivocation, the hypothesis (page 16-7 subsection 1.3.2.) that: "There is a relationship between increased flexible work patterns and increased employment of Educated Saudi females".

### **7.2.2 Flexible employment policies and practices**

Having presented the findings concerning views on flexible employment in relation to women's labour market and employment opportunities in general, Table 7.2.2a presents the views of the respondents to the questionnaire survey regarding the possibility of increasing the employment opportunities of educated women in Saudi Arabia through the adoption of flexible employment policies and practices.

TABLE 7.2.2A: VIEWS ON RELATION BETWEEN FLEXIBILITY IN EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES AND INCREASE OF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Variable Group	Group Panel					Frequency (valid)	% (Valid)	Mean	Standard Deviation
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed				
Disagree Strongly	0	0	2	2	0	4	.3	4.4766	0.75996
Disagree Slightly	0	2	9	8	4	23	1.7		
Neutral	16	12	13	25	62	128	9.5		
Agree Slightly	72	36	61	87	109	365	27.1		
Agree Strongly	107	108	98	201	315	829	61.4		
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100		

Table 7.2.2a displays the results of the survey on the possibility of increasing the employment opportunities of educated women in Saudi Arabia by implementing flexible employment practices. It shows that, respectively; 61.4% agree strongly, 27.1% agree slightly, 9.5% are neutral, 1.7% disagree slightly, and 0.3% disagree strongly that the adoption of flexible employment practices will improve the employment situation of female graduates in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the general findings are consistent with views at an organisational level, with the majority of respondents per group panel agreeing strongly with the statement. The mean value of 4.4766 indicates that most of the participants have displayed agreement with the statement that: “flexibility in employment practices increases the employment opportunities of educated women in Saudi Arabia”. Again, these findings support the hypothesis of “a relationship between increased flexible work patterns and increased employment of educated Saudi Arabian females”.

### Working Patterns

In addition to accessing and analyzing data on views regarding the general potential of flexible employment practices for addressing female employment in general and in particular the labour market situation of educated Saudi women, it is also important to analyse employees’ preferences for potential flexible working patterns. The purpose of this analysis is to address two objectives.

First, it is to answer the research question about the “the nature of flexible forms of employment in Saudi Arabia and the context in which they may be offered and considered by employers and employees”.

Second, it aims to further test the hypotheses of a relationship between increased flexible work patterns and increased employment of educated Saudi females. The preferences indicated by the respondents who participated in the survey, which are presented in Table 7.2.2b, are an important starting point for considering effective approaches and forms of flexible employment in terms of firms’ future HRM policies.

TABLE 7.2.2B: KW TEST ON VIEWS ON RELATION BETWEEN FLEXIBILITY IN EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES AND INCREASE OF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Group (Control Variables)	Group Categories	Mean Rank	Test	Asymp. Sig. (p)
Company	A	645.36	KW Test	.035*
	B	723.28		
	C	620.69		
	Local Government	680.38		
	Unemployed	687.97		
Type of Firm	Saudi Firm	673.87	KW Test	.031*
	Multinational Firm	683.37		

*Note:* (\*) Statistically significant at 5% level; (\*\*) Statistically significant at 10%

The findings presented reveal that statistically, using the Kruskal Wallis test, there is a positive relationship between flexibility in employment practices and increase in the employment opportunities of educated women in Saudi Arabia and therefore, in this regard, the hypothesis is satisfactorily tested. It is noteworthy that all control variables are statistically significant at 5% significance value, implying that those falling into different group categories presented slightly different opinions in relation to the statement evaluated by Table 7.2.2b. The ranking of mean values varies between different group categories pertaining to the same control variable. For example, in the case of the Companies, the mean rank of 620.69 shows that, collectively, those working for company C expressed opinions that are slightly different to those expressed by participants working for Company B (732.28).

### 7.2.3 Flexible work for Female Graduates

One important aspect that the study aimed to investigate is the extent to which current HRM policies respond to Saudi female graduates' needs. In this respect, the research also aimed to identify strategies which could help encourage women to enter the workforce market and motivate them to remain employed. Related analyses sought to address the research question about whether and how labour flexibility can be “a viable solution to the problem of unemployment (rather than underemployment) among educated Saudi females” and, therefore test the hypothesis about the general labour market usefulness of flexible employment and the specific proposition of the second hypothesis that: “a relationship exists between the challenges Saudi Arabia females face as part of employment practices of organizations and the number of women that are actually employed in the labour market”.

Table 7.2.3a presents the views of the respondents to the questionnaire survey regarding if, and to what extent, they would appreciate being offered more flexible working arrangements. Specifically, respondents are asked to indicate their relative preference range of flexible working arrangements including; annualised hours, flexi-time, job sharing and similar approaches.

TABLE 7.2.3A: VIEWS OF PARTICIPANTS ON FLEXIBLE WORKING PATTERNS OPPORTUNITIES

Variable Group	Group Panel					Frequency (valid)	% (Valid)	Mean	Standard Deviation
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed				
Disagree Strongly	2	5	3	0	6	16	1.2	4.4107	0.85719
Disagree Slightly	5	0	2	10	19	36	2.7		
Neutral	20	13	36	34	25	128	9.5		
Agree Slightly	36	33	61	81	156	367	27.2		
Agree Strongly	132	107	81	198	284	802	59.5		
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100		

The survey results show that, respectively; 59.5% agree strongly, 27.2% agree slightly, 9.5% are neutral, 2.7% disagree slightly, and 1.2% disagree strongly that they would appreciate offers of flexible working arrangements. The same pattern shows across

different organisational group panels, with the majority of respondents in all the panel groups agreeing strongly with the statement that they would appreciate and consider offers of flexible working arrangements. The mean value of 4.4107 indicates that most of the participants agree with the statement.

It would seem that the Saudi job market is yet to embrace, in any significant way, flexible working patterns, even with the evidence of the advantages of this in lowering unemployment and expanding labour market opportunities for female graduates. The lack of uptake in flexible employment as a means of easing the labour problem of female graduates may be a result of more underlying factors including the current lack of a legislative and regulatory framework to support flexible working patterns, socio-cultural and religious factors. The fact that workers who previously had some sort of full time contract remain unemployed could be evidence that traditional, religious or cultural reasons account for why most organizations avoid female employment (Fryer & Loury, 2008).

TABLE 7.2.3B: KW TEST ON VIEWS OF PARTICIPANTS ON FLEXIBLE WORKING PATTERNS OPPORTUNITIES

Group (Control Variables)	Group Categories	Mean Rank	Test	Asymp. Sig. (p)
Company	A B C Local Government Unemployed	722.18 728.22 564.60 686.05 673.01	KW Test	.000*
Type of Firm	Saudi Firm Multinational Firm		KW Test	.000*
Employment Sector	Public Private None	696.02 632.99 685.43	KW Test	.016*
Type of Employment	N/A Part-time Full-time Flexible working pattern	690.35 632.50 676.36 433.41	KW Test	.047*
Period to gaining employment	One Month or Less Two to Three Months Four to Six Months Seven to Twelve Months Twelve months to two years Three years to five years Five years to seven years Seven years to nine years Nine years or more	625.58 667.37 612.27 693.52 699.11 741.97 781.50 563.15 689.71	KW Test	.001*

Note: (\*) Statistically significant at 5% level; (\*\*) Statistically significant at 10%



Table 7.2.3b examines the significance of control variables on whether and to what extent respondents would appreciate being offered more flexible working patterns (annualised hours, flexi-time, job sharing or similar approaches).

The five control variables were statistically significant at a significance level of 5%, with an estimated p-value below 0.050, thus denoting key differences between the responses directed at this control variable. For example, in the case of Employment sector, the mean rank of 632.99 shows that those working in the private sector have expressed a different opinion from those in public sector (696.02).

#### **7.2.4 Part-time work**

The question on whether firms need to offer part-time jobs to female graduates in Saudi Arabia was explored in the study. This question is important because there are thousands of female graduates in Saudi Arabia, yet many of them remain unemployed and many more are underutilized due to various political, social and religious challenges. This question is equally useful to determine if these females are ready to take up part-time employment where such vacancies arise. Finally, this question is important to gauge the impact and future relevance of past practices in Saudi Arabia and whether flexible labour market and employment practices can represent potential groundbreaking policy as far as employment problems and issues of female graduates are concerned.

The respondents to the questionnaire survey were also asked whether firms should offer part time work to female graduates to make use of their skills. The findings in respect of this statement are presented in Table 7.2.4a.

TABLE 7.2.4A: FIRMS SHOULD OFFER PART-TIME WORK

Variable Group	Group Panel					Frequency (valid)	% (Valid)	Mean	Standard Deviation
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed				
Disagree Strongly	2	5	15	9	11	42	3.1	4.3781	0.97033
Disagree Slightly	5	2	15	11	16	49	3.7		
Neutral	14	7	21	14	21	77	5.7		
Agree Slightly	47	52	68	61	142	370	27.4		
Agree Strongly	127	92	64	228	300	811	60.1		
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100		

The study revealed that respectively, 87.5% either agreed or strongly agreed, 5.7% of respondents are neutral, 3.7% disagreed slightly, and 3.1% disagreed strongly with the statement that “Firms should offer part-time work to female graduates to make use of our skills”. The mean value of 4.3781 indicates that most of the participants agree with the statement that “Firms should offer part-time work to female graduates to make use of our skills”. Interestingly, these findings resonate with the response of female interviewees at Company A who suggested that there should be a situation where “all companies are forced to let females have the right to choose flexible working hours and part time jobs”.

A closer inspection of the views of respondents across participating organisations reveals that company A had the highest percentage of respondents who strongly agreed that firms should offer part time work to female graduates. This may be because the findings also show that company A offers the least opportunity for part-time jobs, followed by company B and then company C. A closer look at the organizational structure of company A and scrutiny of interview discussions indicate that compared to company B and company C, the organizational structure of company A has less allowance for part time jobs. Conversely, for company B Bank and company C, part-time jobs seem to be either a norm or priority, because as private organisations, they are more concerned about issues of labour cost.

The findings also indicate that a high number of the unemployed are females who also happen to be more willing to take up part time job opportunities whenever they arise.

In that regard, the findings support the ILO's (2010) argument that ultimately; part time work provides a win-win solution for women who struggle to balance their traditional and cultural roles at home with work needs.

TABLE 7.2.4B: KW TEST ON FIRMS SHOULD OFFER PART-TIME WORK

Group (Control Variables)	Group Categories	Mean Rank	Test	Asymp. Sig. (p)
Company	A B C Local Government Unemployed	711.28 673.30 483.67 741.63 688.64	KW Test	.000*
Age	18-24 25-34 35-44 45-60	592.03 682.23 726.07 701.13	KW Test	.000*
Degree Qualification	Engineering Health, Medicine Education Languages Business Studies Marketing Human Resources Creative Arts Media Computer/IT Law Other	604.30 718.27 691.58 713.64 587.83 727.65 778.37 746.97 716.35 482.75 944.00	KW Test	.000*
Type of Firm	Saudi Firm Multinational Firm	671.98 697.32	KW Test	.000*
Employment Sector	Public Private None	730.03 566.43 700.94	KW Test	.000*
Period to gaining employment	One Month or Less Two to Three Months Four to Six Months Seven to Twelve Months Twelve months to two years Three years to five years Five years to seven years Seven years to nine years Nine years or more	562.11 713.78 650.78 660.42 646.92 863.93 681.15 636.94 762.91	KW Test	.000*

Note: (\*) Statistically significant at 5% level; (\*\*) Statistically significant at 10%

All control variables are statistically significant at 5% significance value, implying that those pertaining to different group categories do not share the same opinion in relation to

the statement evaluated by Table 7.2.4b. The ranking of mean values varies between different group categories pertaining to the same control variable.

For example, comparing the companies, the mean rank of 483.67 shows that respondents working for company C have expressed a significantly different opinion from those working for Company B (673.30) or Company A (711.28).

### 7.2.5 Temporary/ short term contracts

Regarding views on use of temporary and short term contracts, again, as shown in Table 7.2.5a, the findings indicate a positive view of these flexible arrangements as an effective way for Saudi female graduates to enter the labour market, with almost 70% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the proposition that “temporary or short term contracts are an effective way to enter the labour market”. 15.1% are neutral, and 15.7% disagree strongly or slightly with the statement.

TABLE 7.2.6A: TEMPORARY AGENCIES AND SHORT TERM CONTRACTS ARE AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO ENTER THE LABOUR MARKET

Variable Group	Group Panel					Total	% (Valid)	Mean	Standard Deviation
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed				
Disagree Strongly	22	5	5	14	49	95	7.0	3.7042	1.13580
Disagree Slightly	23	22	38	6	29	118	8.7		
Neutral	37	44	31	48	44	204	15.1		
Agree Slightly	91	61	88	162	204	606	44.9		
Agree Strongly	22	26	21	93	164	326	24.2		
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100		

The same pattern is repeated at an organisational level, with the majority of respondents in each group panel agreeing either strongly or slightly with the hypothesis. The mean value of 3.7042 indicates that more than half of the participants have displayed agreement with

the proposition that “Temporary agencies and short term contracts are an effective way to enter the labour market”.

TABLE 7.2.5B: KW TEST ON TEMPORARY AGENCIES / SHORT-TERM CONTRACTS ARE AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO ENTER THE LABOUR MARKET.

Group (Control Variables)	Group Categories	Mean Rank	Test	Asymp. Sig. (p)
Company	A B C Local Government Unemployed	553.60 584.31 569.46 754.83 739.35	KW Test	.000*
Place of study	Graduated in Saudi-Arabia Graduated abroad	690.04 564.04	KW Test	0.000*
Degree Qualification	Engineering Health, Medicine Education Languages Business Studies Marketing Human Resources Creative Arts Media Computer/IT Law Other	604.96 602.06 728.87 672.25 583.65 792.80 789.53 713.45 727.21 798.17 720.50	KW Test	.000*
Level of Degree Education	High school Diploma Bachelor Master	1011.75 937.83 682.41 586.80	KW Test	.000*
Type of Firm	None Saudi Firm Multinational Firm	730.23 680.68 549.82	KW Test	.000*
Employment Sector	Public Private None	698.31 583.19 730.08	KW Test	.000*
Type of Employment	N/A Part-time Full-time Flexible working pattern	730.23 625.36 652.67 889.95	KW Test	.001*
Period to gaining employment	One Month or Less Two to Three Months Four to Six Months Seven to Twelve Months Twelve months to two years Three years to five years Five years to seven years Seven years to nine years Nine years or more	641.69 592.28 617.86 684.47 699.52 678.19 927.67 605.70 822.19	KW Test	.000*

Note: (\*) Statistically significant at 5% level; (\*\*) Statistically significant at 10%

As shown in Table 7.2.5b, examination of the significance of control variables on the notion that “temporary agencies and/or short term contracts are an effective way to enter the labour market”, shows that the control variables are statistically significant at a

significance level of 5%. Thus denoting key differences between the responses directed at these control variables.

The ranking of mean values varies between different group categories pertaining to the same control variable. For example, in the case of Type of employment, the mean rank of 652.67 shows that, unsurprisingly, those working full-time have expressed a significantly different opinion from those working on a flexible schedule (889.95).

### 7.2.6 Continuing prospects

In light of the fact that a relatively significant number of the unemployed had been employed at some point, the study sought to assess respondents' confidence about the labour market and the potential for long-term employment. Consequently, the survey questionnaire included a statement about the level of confidence in the prospect of remaining in employment having entered the labour market. The responses to this statement are analysed and presented in Table 7.2.6a.

TABLE 7.2.6A: CONFIDENCE IN REMAINING EMPLOYED AFTER ENTERING THE LABOUR MARKET

Variable Group	Group Panel					Frequency (valid)	% (Valid)	Mean	Standard Deviation
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed				
Disagree Strongly	5	0	3	18	66	92	6.8	3.9674	1.22552
Disagree Slightly	3	22	13	13	56	107	7.9		
Neutral	19	12	12	22	97	162	12.0		
Agree Slightly	57	31	60	112	120	380	28.2		
Agree Strongly	111	93	95	158	151	608	45.1		
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100		

As the table indicates, over 73% felt confident they would remain employed once they entered the labour market. 28.2% of respondents agreed slightly with the statement, 45.1% agreed strongly, 12% remained neutral, 7.9% disagreed slightly, and 6.8% disagreed strongly. The same pattern can be observed, across all five group panels, with a majority of respondents in each group agreeing either strongly or slightly with the proposition.

The mean value, 3.9674, indicates that more than half of the participants have confidence that, after entering the labour market, they will remain employed.

TABLE 7.2.6B: KW TEST ON CONFIDENCE IN REMAINING EMPLOYED AFTER ENTERING THE LABOUR MARKET

Group (Control Variables)	Group Categories	Mean Rank	Test	Asymp. Sig. (p)
Company	A B C Local Government Unemployed	787.11 765.23 753.09 730.23 535.72	KW Test	.000*
Age	18-24 25-34 35-44 45-60	610.74 683.72 698.91 737.13	KW Test	.016*
Place of study	Graduated in Saudi-Arabia Graduated abroad	664.60 751.72	KW Test	0.005*
Degree Qualification	Engineering Health, Medicine Education Languages Business Studies Marketing Human Resources Creative Arts Media Computer/IT Law Other	791.94 642.45 624.39 735.29 698.02 962.28 660.26 702.62 671.13 963.17 1045.50	KW Test	.000*
Level of Degree Education	High school Diploma Bachelor Master	860.25 757.95 660.98 717.20	KW Test	.032*
Type of Firm	None Saudi Firm Multinational Firm	541.92 729.52 729.47	KW Test	.000*
Employment Sector	Public Private None	42.1 28.4 29.5	KW Test	.000*
Type of Employment	Full-Time Part-Time Flexible None	729.06 740.87 534.45	KW Test	.000*
Period to gaining employment	One Month or Less Two to Three Months Four to Six Months Seven to Twelve Months Twelve months to two years Three years to five years Five years to seven years Seven years to nine years Nine years or more	784.02 717.67 743.49 695.36 648.21 565.35 577.48 241.66 739.23	KW Test	.000*

Note: (\*) Statistically significant at 5% level; (\*\*) Statistically significant at 10%

However, further analysis and examination of data indicates that not all control variables' p-values are below 0.05, implying that there is not strong enough evidence that this applies

to all control groups. The ranking of mean values varies between different group categories pertaining to the same control variable. For example, in the case of Degree qualification, the mean rank of 624.39 shows that those with a degree in Education have expressed a significantly different opinion from those with a degree in Engineering (791.94), or from those with a degree in Law (963.17).

### 7.2.7 Ownership of firm

Among the main challenges to the Saudisation project are the interrelated issues of the attitude of Saudi citizens to foreign private sector employment and the latter's reluctance to employ Saudi nationals (Alshakha, 1995; Ramady, 2005). Among other things, the limited success of Saudisation is attributed to the fact that Saudis are reluctant to take up private sector employment, because they generally consider it to be less prestigious compared to public sector employment. For their part, foreign corporations are also reluctant to hire Saudi citizens because they find them relatively more difficult to discipline (ibid). To assess the veracity of this arguments and, more importantly, their implications for the employment problems of Saudi female graduates, this study asked respondents views on their level of agreement with the statement: I would prefer to gain employment with a foreign multi-national rather than a Saudi or state-owned organization. Respondents' views in terms of degrees of agreement and/or disagreement are analysed and presented in Table 7.2.7a.

TABLE 7.2.7A: PREFERENCE OF WORKING IN A FOREIGN MNC

Variable Group	Group Panel					Frequency (valid)	% (Valid)	Mean	Standard Deviation
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed				
Disagree Strongly	18	12	24	144	208	406	30.1	2.6716	1.40250
Disagree Slightly	32	38	21	58	78	227	16.8		
Neutral	60	51	76	41	67	295	21.9		
Agree Slightly	48	45	41	31	81	246	18.2		
Agree Strongly	37	12	21	49	56	175	13.0		
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100		



The results, as shown above, indicate that 46.9% either slightly or strongly disagree, over 20% are neutral and slightly over 30% agreed that they “would prefer to gain employment with a foreign multi-national rather than a Saudi or state-owned organization”.

It would seem that, even though the perception of many female graduates is that foreign companies are more likely to offer flexible working (see below), there is a stronger preference for Saudi or state owned organisations over foreign multinationals. A closer inspection of the results shows that a significant number of the unemployed (208 out of 490), were also of the view that they would prefer to work for Saudi-owned organisations than foreign organisations.

Although the mean value of 2.6716 does not represent a decisive preference, the results, nevertheless, give some credibility to the argument that Saudi citizens prefer public sector employment over foreign private sector employment. While there is also no evidence that links this to unemployment among Saudi female graduates, it is not unreasonable to assume that it will have some impact, if only for the fact that it may also have implications for the job seeking behaviour of unemployed Saudis. Table 7.2.7b presents the results of the examination of the significance of control variables on the statement: I would prefer to gain employment with a foreign multi-national rather than a Saudi or state-owned organisation.

TABLE 7.2.7B: KW TEST ON PREFERENCE OF WORKING IN A FOREIGN MNC

Group (Control Variables)	Group Categories	Mean Rank	Test	Asymp. Sig. (p)
Company	A B C Local Government Unemployed	842.71 787.94 791.11 575.60 594.00	KW Test	.000*
Place of study	Graduated in Saudi-Arabia Graduated abroad	653.30 835.14	KW Test	0.000*
Degree Qualification	Engineering Health, Medicine Education Languages Business Studies Marketing Human Resources Creative Arts Media Computer/IT Law Other	752.91 746.10 578.56 717.14 750.76 993.54 687.85 761.19 641.38 352.50 203.50	KW Test	.000*
Level of Degree Education	High school Diploma Bachelor Master	865.06 584.18 656.19 767.42	KW Test	.000*
Type of Firm	None Saudi Firm Multinational Firm	595.37 693.66 758.17	KW Test	.000*
Employment Sector	Public Private None	671.38 769.26 589.46	KW Test	.000*
Type of Employment	N/A Part-time Full-time Flexible working pattern	595.37 717.32 704.30 867.59	KW Test	.000*
Period to gaining employment	One Month or Less Two to Three Month Four to Six Months Seven to Twelve Months Twelve months to two years Three years to five years Five years to seven years Seven years to nine years Nine years or more	719.03 785.27 721.17 655.89 652.24 624.32 631.24 544.49 566.31	KW Test	.000*

Note: (\*) Statistically significant at 5% level; (\*\*) Statistically significant at 10%

Table 7.2.7b indicates the answers are consistence for all control variables: Company, Degree Qualification, and Type of firm, Employment sector, and Period to gaining employment. Accordingly, all control variables are statistically significant at 5% significance value, implying that those pertaining to different group categories do not share the same opinion in relation to the statement evaluated by Table 6.3.7b.

The ranking of mean values varies between different group categories pertaining to the same control variable. For example, in the case of Period to gaining employment, the mean rank of 652.24 shows that those who have spent twelve months to two years searching for employment have expressed a significantly different opinion from those who have spent less than six months searching for employment (for these group categories the mean ranks varying from 655.89 up to 785.27).

Having presented and discussed the survey data in relation to views about flexibility, flexible employment policies and arrangements and attitudes about employment in public, indigenous and foreign multinational sectors, the following sections cover the same issues based on interview data. As alluded to in the introduction, survey findings mirror the literature in terms of a lack of clear consensus and clarity as to what constitutes flexibility. In that respect, although some respondents express some knowledge of various forms of flexible employment, there is also a general tendency to view flexible work arrangements mainly as working from home. Although the data suggests that participants are largely agreed on the possibilities that flexibility offers in relation to the problem of unemployment among female graduates, there are also some strong indications of the absence of flexible employment arrangements beyond the time that is given for ‘feeding after giving birth’ and mourning. With respect to the crucial issues of gender relations and implications for employment opportunities for women in general, but especially female graduates, the data shows a strong consensus among women regarding gender equality in matters of employment and labour market access. Having said that, there is a strong view among employers and government represents that women need to do more to take advantage of the opportunities that are currently offered by existing policy.

## **Interviews**

The survey findings presented above are not only consistent in terms of general high percentage of similarity in responses across group panels, but the responses are also consistent with the answers provided by the respondents who agreed to participate in the semi-structured interviews. In that regard, the interview data represents a confirmation of the survey findings and can be regarded as a more detailed and in-depth expression of answers that indicate a consistency of opinion among Saudi Arabian employees.

Thus, regarding flexible employment and flexible working arrangements, for example, the following comment of a female Company A employee to one of the few ‘semi-structured’ survey questions is very representative of the general view on the availability of flexible employment opportunities. According to her:

“...there are no options in the Saudi market for part-time work. Unfortunately after 9 years of working full time, I will have to give up my career and leave the labour market to spend more time with my family and child since there are no options for flexible working arrangements.”

This view is not only representative of the majority view, but it also, to some extent, reflects the frustration that is caused by the lack of policies and opportunities for Saudi women to manage their traditional social roles and at the same time, pursue and manage a successful career in the formal labour market. As the survey findings have indicated, almost 90% of the respondents agreed that firms should offer flexible working patterns to female graduates and a significant majority also agreed that flexibility in employment practices would increase the employment opportunities of educated women in Saudi Arabia.

The interview findings, which are presented and discussed in the following paragraphs, provide a more in-depth detailed account of views on flexibility as a tool for addressing the labour market and employment problems of female graduates in Saudi Arabia. Generally, and crucially, these views are consistent with the views and sentiments given above. Although the responses presented and discussed here draw on a number of questions about flexibility and flexible working arrangements, the discussions centre on examples which reflect the general trend and the limited but clear departures from the trend.

In terms of respondents' views on the concept and nature of flexible employment, the interviews revealed that few respondents are aware of the real complexity of the concept and most can only provide a limited description of what "flexible employment" entails. For example, some interviewees at Company B Bank think that "flexible employment is just part time employment". Others define "flexible employment" from a work environment and spatial perspective and, thus, flexible employment is: "To have flexible working hours, or work from home concept - remote staff working". For some of the interviewees, there is no common practice within the company they represent and their view of flexible employment is that it is best defined by circumstance and particular situations. Accordingly, one interviewee responded: "I am not sure. If you mean flexible working hours, then it is not permitted in general, yet personnel can authorize this on a case-by-case basis".

The idea that flexible working arrangements are not a common practice in the Saudi Arabian working environment is also supported by interview data. In that regard, one of the employees from company B Bank, for example, pointed out that "flexible working is a new thing in the world of work: especially in the Middle East; and we have just introduced it in a limited way".

A similar opinion is expressed by one of the respondents working for Company A, who indicates that flexible employment within the company is restricted to special personal events that prevent employees from being present full-time at work. Accordingly, he notes:

“I do not know of any specific policies regarding flexi time other than the ones that pertain to maternity leave and shortened work hours after that. I have not seen this subject ever addressed in our communications or advertising and have rarely, if ever, seen female-focused messaging.”

This view is supported by the response of another employee, working for the same company, Company A, who noted that “flexibility is really limited to female employees who are entitled to an hour feeding time post-maternity leave, 30 days leave of absence (with full pay) when a husband dies and four months and ten days Eddah – period of mourning (without pay). Apart from these, working virtually from their houses is very rare.”

The focus of the responses on the entitlements of female employees reflects, as indicated earlier, limited understanding of the concepts and nature of flexible employment and flexible working arrangements. Based on these common perceptions of the term and referring to company A, another respondent noted:

“It [company A] does have policies that allow flexible employment, mainly for females. Flexible employment is permitted, to some extent, but I would not say it is actively encouraged. It depends on the specific manager as to whether they allow a particular employee to work flexibly. The employment manuals detail that some employees can work a shorter day and list the maximum permitted number of unpaid days that can be authorized.”

However, despite the considerable number of those who attested that company A provides a certain type of flexible working, some employees of the company claim to be completely

unaware of these and/or any intention of the company to support flexible employment and working practices.

Accordingly, one interviewee stated that he is “not aware of anything that supports flexible employment” and another claimed likewise, stating: “I have yet to hear that term in the organization other than in surveys and discussions with a couple of colleagues. However, I would be in complete support of it if the organization is to adopt it”.

With respect to Company A, two conclusions can be drawn from the interview evidence. First, it suggests that employees do not have a full grasp of the various dimensions of flexibility in the context of employment and working arrangements. Yet, their responses also raise issues such as part-time work and work arrangements, which are consistent with some literature and public policy debates about flexible employment (Kersley et al., 2006). The second conclusion is that interview evidence indicates either absence of flexible employment practices in the company, or, a significant lack of knowledge among employees as to what these entail. In that respect, perhaps one can argue that the findings underline the fact that flexibility is generally the prerogative of management to offer (Procter and Ackroyd, 2009).

Like Company A, company C employees also deny having encountered flexible employment within their company. As one interviewee put it; “until now, we don’t have any policies or options for this in company C since it’s not deployed.” Another response advanced by an interviewee from company C, which echoes the views expressed by some company A’s interviewees is a view that sees flexibility in terms of gender differentiation based a socio-cultural perspective. Thus:

“Within the organisation, flexible employment is implemented differently between male and female staff. Female staff have their own terms of employment due to cultural restrictions on time, period of work and transportation.”

Generally, the opinions expressed by interviewees validate the survey data in terms of views about the implications of flexible employment practices for the labour situation of women and the fact that, in spite of such opinions, many consider flexible employment to be non-existent in the Saudi labour market.

This view and sentiment is captured in an extended description of “flexible employment” with reference to the UK by one of the interviewees, who noted:

“The term ‘flexible employment’ does not exist in Saudi Arabia. When I worked in the UK, for example, flexible hours existed there and it means that an employee could come in for a few days/hours a week and for the rest of the week, they could work from home. This means an employee could work flexibly according to their ability and around their schedule. Another term for this is flexi-time. My understanding and experience is that the UK applies this policy for pregnant women who become first time mothers as an example. We do not have flexible employment in Saudi Arabia at all (unless if private companies apply this as choice in their own organisation), although our company does have unpaid leave and emergency leave – according to management approval”.

Interviewees from all the respective panel groups were also asked specifically if they thought employers were flexible in their attitude to working arrangements, and whether they were offered alternative flexible working arrangements during their selection process. Generally, responses to these questions are consistent with the views in responses to similar survey statements and/or questions. However, the responses of the representatives of the unemployed group stand out in terms of emphasis of rigidity in employer attitudes, their [employers] inability to come up with creative solutions to employment issues, and general lack of interest or unawareness of alternative forms of engaging their employees in the activity they need to perform. In that regard, the following response of one of the interviewees captures these views:



“According to my knowledge and from my friends and relatives, I see that most employers are not flexible or imaginative towards making any changes to work rules. Actually, no! No one offered me flexible working agreement or work share agreement”.

Some express the employers’ rigidity in terms of retaining old practices and a failure to recognize the changing context of employment even in Saudi Arabia. Accordingly, one respondent accuses employers of “practising and keeping the same old pattern of employment procedures, and that working patterns are the same as before; same working hours and same rigid pattern as before. No one has ever offered me a flexible hours employment contract.” Another unemployed interviewee suggested that the lack of flexible employment patterns are a sign of inadaptability, saying: “No, in my opinion present employers have been following the same old rules for so many years, and the old rules have never changed despite changing attitudes and labour market”.

Consistent with views on the concept and nature of flexibility and flexible employment, those who registered views on the actual implementation of flexible employment also generally indicated only a limited understanding of the phrase, referring mainly to “part time hours” as their view of flexible employment. Accordingly, one interviewee refers to the recent implementation of one form of flexible work here: men and women to work part-time hours after preparing the format for this sort of work agreement.

The interview responses so far presented and, which, on the whole, appear consistent across the varying background and companies, demonstrate that very little exists in Saudi Arabia in terms of flexible employment. Where this exists, it is a fairly recent phenomenon, and likely to be within foreign companies. Yet, taken together, evidence from the survey and interview shows the appetite for it, and the view that it is a needed solution is pervasive among Saudi female graduates.

In order to further explore the issue of flexible working, the interviewees were also asked whether their organisations use any of the following specific flexible employment practices:

- I. Annualised hours: where the employee commits to work a certain number of hours per year but these are spread across core hours and can be fitted around the demands of the business or the employee's commitments.
- II. Flexi-time: where the employee works a certain number of core hours during the day but their start and finish time can be flexible.
- III. Compressed hours: where the employee works longer daily hours than their co-workers but works a shorter week than other staff.
- IV. Part-time hours – working only a few days a week.
- V. Working from home.
- VI. Job sharing: where two or more individuals work a certain number of hours with the total hours making up a full time equivalent.

If they identified any of these practices as being used in their organisations, interviewees were then asked to give views on how this works for the organisation in terms of motivation and encouragement, and particularly for female graduates to join their organization. The following sections present interview responses with respect to each form of flexible working arrangement.

### **Annualised hours**

The representatives answering on behalf of the Ministry of Higher Education dismissed the question as implying details that do not need to be established as rules, but as practices that should be determined by circumstantial exceptions and/or dictated by HRM policy of the individual company.

As far they are concerned, “the relationship is between the employee and the organization, including working arrangements, through the contract of employment”. In other words, public policy should not be used to dictate flexible working arrangements.

For one of the interviewees working for Company B Bank, an annualized hours contractual arrangement is a potentially viable solution that could be implemented within their company. As they see it; “this is regular working hours by which the female employee will commit herself to a basic number of hours in the year and we can arrange with her to work the other hours according to her circumstances”. However, most of his colleagues disagree, indicating that this is by no means a common practice at Company B Bank. One respondent put it very unambiguously: “Yes it can work for some jobs, No, we do not have [annualized hours]”.

The answers provided by the employees of Company A to these questions were similar; with most of them indicating that the company does not offer annualised hours contracts. As one interviewee put it: “no, not aware of this being available”. Moreover, some even argued that annualised hours should be regarded as impossible due to legal restrictions, as well as the nature of the work. According to one of main proponents of this argument:

“The total number of annual hours to be worked by regular employees in Saudi Arabia is set by the Labour Law. These hours are then divided and set per month/week/day. Flexible working hours are not popular practice yet in Saudi Arabia as the majority of Saudi companies are in the industrial sector where scheduled operations are required to be executed in specific time and date. Therefore, flexible work schedules are not feasible for such type of operations.”

Furthermore, just like the majority of respondents from Company B and Company A, COMPANY C employees also indicated that their company has not implemented annualised hours as an employment pattern and, one of the respondents representing the Council of Saudi Chambers indicated that they “see no demand available” for annualised hours contracts of employment.

### **Flexi-time**

Although they did not provide a consistent definition of the concept, responses generally indicate that flexi time (or flexible time) is a more easily accepted arrangement. As evidence of not entirely comprehending the concept, some interviewees relate the concept of flexible time to 24/7 operations. This is reflected in the response given by an Company B Bank employee, who stated: “yes, we do have flexi-time and that is normally with jobs that require 24/7 services”. At the time, some interviewees from the same company, Company B Bank, associated flexi-time with the schedule for women employees. For these interviewees, to quote one them: “this is flexible working hours in which the Saudi woman can work the basic hours. However, the starting and finishing hours can be flexible.” Again, this response reflects the sociocultural influence over how Saudi perceive the role of women in general and, in the context of formal employment (Alsheikh, 2015; Gonzaler et al, 2008; Hamdan, 2005).

The responses from most of the respondents working for Company A indicate that the company does not offer flexi-time working arrangements. Accordingly, one of the interviewees representing the company indicates that “unless the employee has other urgent and important commitments during the day, the fixed work schedule from 7:00 am to 4:00 pm needs to be respected”. Another pointed to the company’s General Instruction Manuals for the specific rules regarding working times and schedule at Company A, noting that: “It [flexi-time] is only applied on irregular and restricted work schedules but the number of shift work hours, starting time, and end time of the working day is specified by

General Instruction Manuals.” Flexi-time is also referred to in relation to part-time work and, in that regard; “there is a full-time 8 hour day and a 6 hour day, which is classed as part-time, but this is not available to everyone as it depends on the actual position being applied for”.

Just as with annualized hours, flexi-time is discussed by Company A employees as impossible to apply due to “labour law and GOSI regulations, which restrict these kinds of employment because of the safety of the employee”.

Interview data from COMPANY C shows that the company does not provide flexi-time employment for its employees and, according to the representative of the Council of Saudi Chambers, although companies can decide to implement flexi-time arrangements, this only proves effective for higher level jobs. Thus; “some companies implement it, but most of the time for higher level jobs but it cannot be executed with jobs related to serving customers”

### **Compressed hours**

Compressed hours seem to describe a type of flexible work pattern that is not common in Saudi Arabia. This view is conveyed in most interviews across the selected companies. A company B interviewee, for example, noted: “no we do not have this” and goes to qualify this by saying:

“No. This is possible but this would need to be according to management’s approval. We have overtime, but if an employee works longer daily hours and needs to come in shorter hours, this would need to be on a one-off approved case, rather than incorporated into the employee’s contract on a fixed regular basis.”

However, a Company A’s interviewee is much more nuanced, saying: “we have a variety of work schedules to meet business needs. In some cases, compressed hours will be activated for a specific period of time to execute the required business operations.”

Evidence from COMPANY C suggests more consistency with Company B as the question about whether the company offers compressed hours contract is generally met with a simple but emphatic “no”.

It is, however, noteworthy to point out that, generally, employees (even those from the same company) are unable to provide consistent answers that could be considered to be representative of the general opinion of the group. For instance, although some of those working for Company A pointed to the possibility of being allowed to work compressed hours in exceptional circumstances, others believe that this would be “against the culture of the organisation”. However, despite the fact that most of the employees indicate that they do not have access to flexible working arrangements, such as compressed hours, some, like one of the Company A interviewees, argues that, based on “experience of this in other companies, I found it extremely beneficial” (Company A).

### **Part-time hours**

Most interviewees representing Company B, Company A, and COMPANY C indicated that their companies do not have policies relating to part-time work. However, some of the respondents from Company A indicated that there are exceptions when part-time hours are considered as a potential employment pattern, either on a medical basis or due to particular employment situations. As one employee noted:

“We have very few employees working on a part-time basis and this has implications on their compensation entitlements. It should be noted that this part time basis to work operates for less working hours than the normal full-time work schedule. In addition, some special work schedules enable employees, especially expats, to work a number of consecutive days continuously without taking weekends and have short leaves in return. Yes it is applicable for those who have reasons for it, such as medically excused employees or part time employees.”

It is also important to notice that with respect to part time hours, the interviewees indicated a predisposition to relate this type of work schedule to female employees and described it as a token of the company's understanding for their role within the family.

It is believed that by applying this practice, the job market can benefit as it increases the chance of gaining access to jobs for a vulnerable group: women. According to the representative of the Ministry of labour: "this allows us to absorb the greatest number of women in the work place and to take into consideration the demands the home environment put on them" (Ministry of Labour).

The perspective of the representative of the Ministry of Labour on part time employment recalls views about compressed hours, as it is described as implying working on a full time schedule for a determined period of time in order to be permitted to take several days off for free. Accordingly, part time employment is:

"an alternative scheme in which the female employee can work 'shift hours'. For example, she may work 8 hours/day for 5 or 7 consecutive days and leave the following 2 weeks free. That scheme would ensure enough free time to dedicate to their families and children".

### **Working from home**

Working from home is similarly perceived as a working pattern that is only available on an exceptional basis. Both Company B Bank and COMPANY C employees indicated that this is not a common HR policy, but the latter revealed that it can be an effective answer to urgent matters. Company A employees also attest that working from home is not common working practices in the company. However, one of the interviewees pointed out that "sometimes, this is applied with supervisor approval, if the employee needs to access special websites not accessible by our company firewall, as an example.

Again, these are special cases to be discussed with direct superiors rather than a permanent fixture in an employee's contract." Another interviewee suggested that working from home can be potential practice if it refers to the extra hours an employee may need to cover his or her job related duties – meaning; "an employee can work extra hours from home, but not during the normal/regular work schedule." This is, to a certain extent, a contradiction of the answer provided by another employee of the company, who note: "not applicable. Even though the company is making it easier for their employees to access their emails from home, but they are not accountable to get work done from anywhere other than their work location", thus indicating that there are no clear regulations in respect to this working arrangement.

Nevertheless, generally, participants viewed working from home as the best arrangement to accommodate women employees, because "one of the best options for a woman is to work from home not far from her children". This type of programme is considered a viable solution for childcare and, therefore, interviewees claim that companies are beginning to contemplate implementing it. Furthermore, another reason for considering this option, besides its viability, is related to constraints imposed by Royal Directive number 121/A, which, according to the interviewee representing the Ministry of Labour "is aimed at taking full measures to fully adapt distance working as a new way through which Saudi women can seek employment and which can be relevant to her home and family needs". However, the interviewees do not seem to be aware of recent debates about working from home and, therefore, their responses have not tended to reflect some of the concerns that are raised in debates about home working. With advances in telecommunications, working from home became a major issue of debate especially in the USA (Shamir and Salomon, 1985). At the time, Shamir and Salomon were concerned more about the implications of home working for the employee's family life. More recently, the debate has been rekindled by the decision of the CEO of Yahoo, Melissa Mayers, to move her office home following the birth of her baby.



As Delfino (2013) notes, the debate is no longer about the technological capacity, but rather by advocates of ‘collaboration’ who argue that the community of the office offers a better environment for productivity, versus ‘Individualists’, who see home working as having the potential to release individual initiative and innovation.

This interviewee also declared that the Ministry considers this option both in terms of the tasks involved, the employee qualification, specific nature of the job and whether the circumstance of the employees lends itself to this type of arrangement. Accordingly: “we see this as distance working. And it is the carrying out of a full task which is “specified” in nature by an employee who is “qualified” from a distant place, away from the normal place of work, like a home or a community centre for women”.

### **Job sharing**

With respect to job sharing, two answers were noted. One indicated that this is not implemented within the company, without providing further comments to indicate either interest or lack thereof, or to justify the decision to avoid this type of practice. In that respect the response is simply; “no we do not have this.” The alternative is represented by the more extensive description of the concept, which demonstrates both a good understanding of the concepts and provides some evidence of interviewee’s experience of it. Hence the statement that:

“This is job sharing through which two female employees can each work a limited number of hours but both will do the number of hours equivalent to one employee on full time hours. This is something we have recently implemented. This option was taken by one of our departments at the bank by giving the employee the right to choose the daily hours according to her needs (for example availability of the driver who would take her back home from work and back to work again”.

However, as further evidence of lack of consensus on this particular form of work arrangement, other employees claim to be unaware of such practices being implemented within the company, thus revealing that job sharing is not a widely used working arrangement. Company A employees also do not perceive job sharing as a company policy.

One of them offered an answer which highlights not only the fact that the company has not implemented this working pattern, but also that the concept itself is not even discussed, and thus, it remains a vague and not fully understood concept for employees. For that interviewee, “the definition is a bit vague. If we are to consider that the full time equivalent is 24 hours, then yes as we have employees working on 3 shifts to make up for the total number of hours.” The quote clearly shows that this particular interviewee confuses job sharing with ‘shift work’.

Although one of the interviewees at COMPANY C claims that “previously we did this kind of scheme but we stopped doing it”, the general view among employees of the company is that the concept does not stand for a practice within the company.

Having presented the interview data on views about the six flexible working arrangements itemised on page 460, the following section discusses the implications of these findings for the main research aim and questions.

## **Discussion**

The crucial core interview question in respect of the findings described above was whether interviewees consider flexible employment practices as viable solutions to problems of unemployment among Saudi citizens in general, but especially female Saudi graduates. Consequently, the discussion will reflect on the findings that are described above in terms of their implications for the labour market opportunities and employment prospects or, the lack thereof, of Saudi female graduates.

With respect to the prevalence of the six flexible working arrangements itemized on page 460 in the companies involved in the study, only six (about 21%) of the twenty-eight interviewees indicated that they have in place, in one form or the other, one of the six flexible employment arrangements. This would support the position, that there is a relatively low incidence of flexible employment practices in Saudi Arabia.

This general view about the lack of opportunities for flexible employment notwithstanding, the data also shows that, generally, interviewees have a very positive view about the viability of flexibility employment practices as a solution. This view is captured by the following quotation attributed to one of the interviewees:

“Yes I believe strongly that by relaxing the rules of employment, providing flexibility, and treating the individual with care and due consideration, especially women, this will reduce unemployment figures”.

The theoretical justification for flexible employment practices, including part time jobs, in Saudi Arabia can be attributed to the unprecedented rise in female graduates (De Bel-Air, 2014; Wang, 2013; UNDP, 2003), who are not only required to perform their duties and responsibilities at work, but who are also expected to do so alongside traditional and socially assigned roles which require them to have sole responsibility for managing their homes and family (Booz and co., 2010; ILO, 2011). Thus, as Booz and Co note, “the system of public education has placed constraints on women’s realization of their equal opportunities in society and their full participation in the labour market” (p. 1).

Moreover, the increase of service industries in Saudi Arabia, as evidenced by the presence of some of the firms that took part in the survey, provides an opportunity for flexible working and part time job opportunities. In fact, the Saudi situation has been warming up to these ideas in the last decades and the government hopes to explore further to see if this will alleviate the unemployment problems among female graduates with useful skills (EWCO, 2007).

There have also been other studies which show that the opportunities presented by part time jobs are able to break the cultural barriers which have historically resulted in low female labour participation. In the long run, allowing females to participate in part time jobs will improve their education standards because they can pursue distance or part time education during their free time (Kammer, 2013). Saudi Arabia adopting the idea of part time jobs to absorb female graduates into the labour market is in line with best practices in developed nations like the UK, US, and Canada. In the UK for example, despite the problems which they associate with certain forms of flexible employment, Ward et al. (2001) report that it accounted for 9-16% of the entire labour force from 1992 to 1999. This is a significant proportion of the labour market, which, if replicated in Saudi Arabia, can boost the economy of Saudi Arabia.

Despite the criticisms of flexibility and flexible employment as exploitative (Legge, 2005; Procter and Ackroyd, 2009) and difficult to manage (Ward et al., 2001), flexible-working patterns can be a good and viable strategy for relieving the job market pressure for Saudi female graduates. Whatever reasons organizations have to avoid employing female graduates, there should be some exploration of flexible working as a middle ground (Bradley, 2005) solution to unemployment. There is documented evidence that the Saudi government has initiated discussions and activities towards offering unemployed female graduates flexible working opportunities (Baldwin-Edwards, 2011). These initiatives target ways of improving female labour market participation, and especially preparing those in higher education for the labour market (Gonzalez et al., 2011). The initiatives include better transport services to working mothers, creation of childcare centres near organizations and teleworking options for jobs access from homes.

There are studies that show that flexible employment has been on the rise since 1990s in many parts of the world. Additionally, flexible employment has been a growing trend especially in the service sectors (HSE, 2011).

Interestingly, some organizations have reported that quality of work can be compromised when flexible shifts are not administered properly (Ward et al., 2001). Moreover, many organizations have reported that flexible work shifts are not recommended because they can induce “psychosomatic disorders”, with behavioural problems (Knutsson, 2003). Consequently, some researchers hold the view that some forms of flexible work, such as shift work, can lead to health problems including disruptive sleep patterns (Waterhouse et al., 1992; Vogel et al., 2012). Consequently, relevant policy and initiatives to introduce such forms of flexible employment in Saudi Arabia should bear these in mind.

Further discredit to flexible working patterns concerns the argument that “temporary jobs may lead to growing labour market segmentation and dualism, trapping growing numbers of workers in a Hobbesian realm of “short, brutish and mean” jobs that offer little employment security, poor pay and fringe benefits, and little prospect of upward mobility” (Rosenberg and Lapidus, 1999 in OECD, 2002, P. 129).

Overall, the goal of this section was to analyse, present and discuss the data on the preferences of current and potential employees in terms of how they define their workplaces and employment in general in relation to the presence and potential implications of flexible employment practices. In that respect, the findings generally indicate that although there is no clear consensus on conceptions of various flexible employment arrangements, the evidence suggests low uptake in flexible employment practices in Saudi Arabia. Notwithstanding or despite this, evidence from both the survey and interview unambiguously show that participants (including the representatives of government and employers) agree that flexible employment presents a viable solution to the unemployment and disadvantaged labour market position of Saudi female graduates.

Consequently, it can be argued that the hypothesis that “there is a relationship between increased flexible work patterns and increased employment of educated Saudi Arabian females” has been proven. However, this consensus is also qualified by the idea that the

effectiveness of flexible employment practices should be assessed by the extent to which they could provide women with the chance to balance professional and personal life and to work in an environment which they would not perceive as being in any way hostile.

The following section presents and discusses findings relating to potential hostile characteristics which define workplace environment and are perceived as resulting from gender differences. The aim, in this regard, is to test the hypothesis about the relationship between the challenges women face as part of employment practices and the number actually employed in the labour market.

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### 7.3 GENDER DIFFERENTIATION

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A significant body of literature has focused on gender relations in Saudi Society and its implications for women (Booz & Co, 2010; Ramady, 2005). In a patriarchal society such as Saudi Arabia, whose traditional concepts are further enhanced by deep cultural and religious beliefs, the existing gender bias is undeniable. Some have attributed this to the lack of robust initiatives and innovation to address gender inequality, which contributes to problems that females encounter in the labour market (Al-Rasheed, 2013). Crawley et al. (2013) argue that quite apart from the problems of access and securing employment, women who insist on working outside the home could potentially face a backlash.

Based on the extent to which Saudi women's level of labour market participation and employment reflects traditional and cultural perceptions about their role in society, this section aims to analyse the real or potential difference in the treatment of women and men as employees or potential employees. Perceived and real inequalities will be presented and discussed using the survey and interview findings. The differences are assessed using level of compensation, the prejudice which women are confronted with, women's access to jobs and the level of training provided for both genders.

### 7.3.1 Pay

Those who participated in the questionnaire survey were asked if they believed female graduates in Saudi Arabia receive pay comparable to their male counterparts.

The views of respondents are analysed and presented in Table 7.3.1a.

TABLE 7.3.1A: VIEWS ON MEN AND WOMEN PAY EQUALITY

Variable Group	Group Panel					Total	% (Valid)	Mean	Standard Deviation
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed				
Disagree Strongly	36	31	59	62	78	266	19.7	3.0845	1.40768
Disagree Slightly	43	62	53	35	91	284	21.1		
Neutral	36	20	18	30	48	152	11.3		
Agree Slightly	46	22	38	102	156	364	26.9		
Agree Strongly	34	23	15	94	117	283	21.0		
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100		

As the data displayed in table indicates, about 48% either slightly or strongly agreed that the pay of female graduates in Saudi Arabia is comparable to those of their male counterparts, whereas 11.3% remained neutral, 21.1% disagreed slightly, and 19.7% disagreed strongly. Although the data shows that more people slightly or strongly agree than disagree that women earn comparable pay to men, at 46%, this represents a minority of the total survey respondents. However, organisational level responses confirm the same pattern, with a slight majority of the respective group panel agreeing either strongly or slightly that women receive comparable pay rates to men. The mean value of 3.0845 indicates that more than half of the participants agreed with the affirmation “I believe female graduates are paid on a level with their male counterparts in Saudi Arabia”.

TABLE 7.3.1B: KW TEST ON VIEWS ON MEN AND WOMEN PAY EQUALITY

Group (Control Variables)	Group Categories	Mean Rank	Test	Asymp. Sig. (p)
Company	A B C Local Government Unemployed	649.66 564.80 505.66 758.95 728.52	KW Test	.000*
Age	18-24 25-34 35-44 45-60	758.65 641.83 688.50 724.29	KW Test	.000*
Place of study	Graduated in Saudi-Arabia Graduated abroad	693.68 537.15	KW Test	0.000*
Degree Qualification	Engineering Health, Medicine Education Languages Business Studies Marketing Human Resources Creative Arts Media Computer/IT Law Other	535.86 771.12 737.88 598.83 566.06 603.02 573.66 733.64 786.00 1111.08 408.50	KW Test	.000*
Level of Degree Education	High school Diploma Bachelor Master	1086.69 612.56 697.29 572.60	KW Test	.000*
Type of Firm	None Saudi Firm Multinational Firm	739.23 690.34 497.78	KW Test	.000*
Employment Sector	Public Private None	708.51 551.21 746.30	KW Test	.000*
Type of Employment	N/A Part-time Full-time Flexible working pattern	739.23 742.25 631.67 1047.09	KW Test	.000*
Period to gaining employment	One Month or Less Two to Three Months Four to Six Months Seven to Twelve Months Twelve months to two years Three years to five years Five years to seven years Seven years to nine years Nine years or more	593.90 628.34 668.22 744.09 616.57 776.10 859.51 605.71 716.93	KW Test	.000*

Note: (\*) Statistically significant at 5% level; (\*\*) Statistically significant at 10%

Table 7.3.1.b examines the significance of control variables on the belief that female graduates are paid on a level with their male counterparts in Saudi Arabia. The control variables are statistically significant at a significance level of 5%, thus denoting differences between the responses directed by these control variables.



For example, in the case of Age, the mean rank of 641.83 shows that those in between 25 and 34 years old have expressed a significantly different opinion from in from 18-24 (758.65) or from those between 35 and 44 (688.50).

### 7.3.2 Females Facing Prejudice at Work

Based on the assumption that gender derived prejudice can significantly impact female graduates' labour market attitude and employment prospects, respondents' views were sought about whether female employees experienced prejudice as employees or in recruitment and selection processes.

TABLE 7.3.2A: VIEWS ON PREJUDICE AT WORK

Variable Group	Group Panel					Frequency (valid)	% (Valid)	Mean	Standard Deviation
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed				
Disagree Strongly	39	52	63	94	93	341	25.3	2.7709	1.32490
Disagree Slightly	35	16	38	45	71	205	15.2		
Neutral	34	40	36	83	177	370	27.4		
Agree Slightly	53	31	26	69	109	288	21.3		
Agree Strongly	34	19	20	32	40	145	10.8		
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349			

The results of the survey of respondents' views regarding whether female employees or potential employees experience prejudice in their employment or the process of seeking employment, presented in Table 7.3.2a show that, overall, only 32.1% agree strongly or slightly, 27.4% are neutral, and 40.5% disagree slightly or strongly that women are subject to prejudicial treatment at the hands of their male employers or potential employers. A thorough analysis and consideration of the views across the different organisations that participated in the study reveals that the public company, company A, seems to have fewer reported incidences of prejudice against female employees or potential employees compared to company B Bank and company C. This could be due to the ability of the government to intervene more easily in company A and, the effects of 'Saudisation' whereby all genders are offered equal opportunity with regard to employment.

Again, firms where such female prejudices are common practice have equally weak human resource policies (Kirton and Greene, 2010), and hence, little room for adjudication whenever complainants come forward. Having presented the data in terms of frequency, Table 7.3.2b presents the results of the examination of the significance of control variables on the proposition that women have faced prejudice from male colleagues at work and/or while seeking employment.

TABLE 7.3.2B: KW TEST ON VIEWS ON PREJUDICE AT WORK

Group (Control Variables)	Group Categories	Mean Rank	Test	Asymp. Sig. (p)
Company	A B C Local Government Unemployed	752.33 648.07 585.20 652.65 701.18	KW Test	.000*
Age	18-24 25-34 35-44 45-60	683.59 692.51 603.01 755.09	KW Test	.004*
Degree Qualification	Engineering Health, Medicine Education Languages Business Studies Marketing Human Resources Creative Arts Media Computer/IT Law Other	732.57 710.14 685.26 680.11 638.61 755.91 775.14 719.14 528.70 448.75 171.00	KW Test	.002*
Level of Degree Education	High school Diploma Bachelor Master	603.56 475.10 670.38 731.39	KW Test	.001*
Type of Firm	None Saudi Firm Multinational Firm	676.13 693.67 605.24	KW Test	.012*
Employment Sector	Public Private None	703.08 635.83 672.63	KW Test	.027*
Type of Employment	N/A Part-time Full-time Flexible working pattern	676.13 736.06 663.18 949.27	KW Test	.025*
Period to gaining employment	One Month or Less Two to Three Months Four to Six Months Seven to Twelve Months Twelve months to two years Three years to five years Five years to seven years Seven years to nine years Nine years or more	619.77 724.01 655.51 641.72 692.60 602.64 777.78 777.93 752.27	KW Test	.002*

Note: (\*) Statistically significant at 5% level; (\*\*) Statistically significant at 10%

The data indicates that all control variables are statistically significant at 5% significance value, as their estimated p-values are below 0.05, implying that different group categories do not share the same opinion in relation to the statement evaluated by Table 7.3.2b. Furthermore, the ranking of mean values varies between different group categories pertaining to the same control variable. For example, in the case of Employment sector, the mean rank of 635.83 shows that those working in the private sector have expressed a significantly different opinion from those working in the public sector (703.08).

Assuming the fact that there is a clear correlation between discrimination and prejudice on the one hand, and access to labour market and treatment at work on the other, the research participants were asked to express their view about the degree of difficulty that women face while looking for work. Those findings which are documented and discussed above generally support the dominant argument about gender relations in Saudi Arabia (see p. 420). Although some suggest that women take greater initiative to advance their labour market access, the findings suggest that this is easier said than done. The sociocultural influences which senior managers/employers cite for their reluctance to hire female graduates are, as Al-Rasheed, (2013) and others indicate, so pervasive, that they influence, as the finding suggests, the authorities' desire and ability to enforce policy which is intended to address the employment problems of women in general and female graduates in particular.

### **7.3.3 Ease or difficulty for females to get jobs**

The study also sought to establish the ease or difficulty with which females obtain jobs within industry compared to males. To this end, participants in the questionnaire survey were asked if they agreed or disagreed that it is much harder for females to gain employment with Saudi firms.

As reported in Table 7.3.3a, almost 70% agreed or strongly agreed that it is much harder for females in the industry to gain employment with Saudi firms than it is for males.

TABLE 7.3.3A: GENDER DISPARITIES IN GAINING EMPLOYMENT

Variable Group	Group Panel					Frequency (valid)	% (Valid)	Mean	Standard Deviation
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed				
Disagree Strongly	9	3	18	29	31	90	6.7	3.7695	1.26330
Disagree Slightly	26	51	47	16	36	176	13.0		
Neutral	26	26	26	40	21	139	10.3		
Agree Slightly	67	54	61	102	186	470	34.8		
Agree Strongly	67	24	31	136	216	474	35.2		
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349			

Accordingly, the data shows that 35.2% agree strongly, 34.8 agree slightly, 10.3% are neutral, 13% disagree slightly and 6.7% disagree strongly. Furthermore, the same pattern is revealed across the various organisations involved in the study, with the majority of respondents per group panel agreeing strongly or slightly with the statement. The mean value of 3.7695 indicates that most of the participants agree that it is much harder for females in industry to gain employment with Saudi firms than it is for males.

Table 7.3.3.b presents the results of the examination of the significance of control variables on the statement that ‘It is much harder for females in my industry to gain employment with Saudi firms than it is for males’. The results show that eight control variables were statistically significant at a significance level of 5%, with an estimated p-value below 0.050, thus denoting key differences between the responses for these control variables. For example, in the case of Degree qualification, the mean rank of 425.67 shows that those with a degree in law have expressed a significantly different opinion from those with a degree in marketing (728.61) or from those with a degree in education (735.15).

TABLE 7.3.3B: KW TEST ON GENDER DISPARITIES IN GAINING EMPLOYMENT

Group (Control Variables)	Group Categories	Mean Rank	Test	Asymp. Sig. (p)
Company	A B C Local Government Unemployed	675.92 505.73 504.00 727.75 758.31	KW Test	.000*
Age	18-24 25-34 35-44 45-60	721.34 679.78 624.31 634.74	KW Test	.024*
Degree Qualification	Engineering Health, Medicine Education Languages Business Studies Marketing Human Resources Creative Arts Media Computer/IT Law Other	657.99 564.33 735.15 756.61 581.74 728.61 669.23 754.61 686.24 425.67 643.50	MWU Test	.000*
Type of Firm	None Saudi Firm Multinational Firm	746.10 674.32 542.83	KW Test	.000*
Employment Sector	Public Private None	726.48 526.37 744.56	KW Test	.000*
Type of Employment	N/A Part-time Full-time Flexible working pattern	746.10 636.14 645.44 773.23	KW Test	.000*
Period to gaining employment	One Month or Less Two to Three Months Four to Six Months Seven to Twelve Months Twelve months to two years Three years to five years Five years to seven years Seven years to nine years Nine years or more	496.92 630.41 617.99 699.90 710.63 848.43 749.34 730.86 708.04	KW Test	.000*

Note: (\*) Statistically significant at 5% level; (\*\*) Statistically significant at 10

### 7.3.4 Training

On the third measure of gender preference, respondents' views were sought on whether and how far there is gender parity in access to and level of training opportunity. Specifically, survey and also interview participants were asked if they believed that female graduates in Saudi Arabia receive the same levels of training as males once employed. The findings, which are reported in Table 7.3.4a, show that, generally, there is no clearly decisive trend. About 41% slightly or strongly disagreed on this, whereas 45.5% either slightly or strongly agreed. Put differently, one could interpret this as males and females having almost the same level of opportunity to attend training.

TABLE 7.3.4A: GENDER DISPARITIES IN TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Variable group	Group Panel					Frequency (valid)	(%) Valid	Mean	Standard deviation
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed				
Disagree Strongly	40	20	28	66	80	234	17.3	3.0660	1.40768
Disagree Slightly	58	41	42	59	124	324	24.0		
Neutral	24	20	25	48	61	178	13.2		
Agree Slightly	50	34	50	87	124	345	25.6		
Agree Strongly	23	43	38	63	101	268	19.9		
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100		

Further analysis show the mean value 3.0660, indicating that the majority of the participants “believe female graduates in Saudi Arabia receive the same levels of training as males once employed”. Furthermore, as indicated in Table 7.3.4b, all control variables are statistically significant at 5% significance value, implying that those in different group categories do not share the same opinion in relation to the statement evaluated. The ranking of mean values varies between different group categories pertaining to the same control variable. For example in the case of Place of study, the mean rank of 582.01 shows that those who graduated abroad have expressed a significantly different opinion from those who graduated in Saudi Arabia (687.60).

TABLE 7.3.4B: KW TEST ON GENDER DISPARITIES IN TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Group (Control Variables)	Group Categories	Mean Rank	Test	Asymp. Sig. (p)
Company	A B C Local Government Unemployed	598.17 726.13 698.19 674.58	KW Test	.021*
Place of study	Graduated in Saudi-Arabia Graduated abroad	687.60 582.01	KW Test	0.001*
Degree Qualification	Engineering Health, Medicine Education Languages Business Studies Marketing Human Resources Creative Arts Media Computer/IT Law Other	500.11 718.52 675.01 663.92 690.99 735.13 750.89 603.45 595.12 1062.25 396.50	KW Test	.002*
Level of Degree Education	High school Diploma Bachelor Master	887.56 516.75 695.84 601.77	KW Test	.000*
Period to gaining employment	One Month or Less Two to Three Months Four to Six Months Seven to Twelve Months Twelve months to two years Three years to five years Five years to seven years Seven years to nine years Nine years or more	605.16 696.27 748.68 666.62 686.62 500.29 815.81 739.51 722.19	KW Test	.000*

Note: (\*) Statistically significant at 5% level; (\*\*) Statistically significant at 10%

## Interviews

For purposes of data reliability and to acquire more in-depth information that may also shed some light on the reasons behind survey responses, the same questions were put to interviewees using a semi-structured approach.

Regarding general attitudes to gender relations in Saudi Arabia, the representative of the Ministry of Higher Education attested that “changes in attitude towards women at work” could be observed in the current state of the Saudi workforce market. However, despite such claims of positive change of attitude, other government officials, for example, representatives of the Ministry of Labour, have indicated that there are still some important drawbacks in the current system with respect to offering women access to employment.

As one of them puts it: “there is currently a lack of opportunities for women to work because that would require employers to make separate provision for women in the work environment”. An official of the Ministry of Labour who cited census data to show that the rate of unemployment is significantly higher for women than men also confirms the lack of consistency in the opportunities offered to women and men. According to this interviewee:

“The Department [of Labour] made a census of all job seekers through a programme of incentives (Hafaz) and the total number of those who enrolled into the programme and satisfied the entry requirement was approximately one and a half million, both male and female, and the percentage of females was 80%.”

When questioned about the percentage of national female graduates hired by the company, the respondents from Company B Bank either gave different answers, or claimed not to have the information. One of the respondents indicated that most women working in the company are deployed in jobs and/or branches that are dedicated to serving women and that outside these areas, the percentage of female graduates working for the bank is estimated to be 14%. In his words:

“We have to put in our mind that we are a bank and the high percentage of employed ladies are in ladies’ branches. But to compare fairly, we should look at the numbers outside the branches, in which we have just reached about 14% only of graduate ladies.”

Another respondent indicated that the “percentage of female employees at the bank is 11%, all of them Saudi nationals, of which 91% are female graduates.” Yet, another employee who sought to highlight the Bank’s unbiased gender attitude stressed that “the number of female colleagues is on the increase and working together without any sexual harassment and some of these ladies enjoy positions of authority”.



After assessing the current situation with respect to women employed in the Bank, the researcher considered it necessary to also seek the opinion of the company's representatives with respect to the implications of limitations imposed by the wider socio/political and religious context for HR policies and, consequently, the entire employment system. When asked whether the recruitment policies towards females are impacted by the culture and religion of the Saudi Arabia, one of the interviewees answered:

“This is for sure. Legislative, social, educational and occupational constraints prevent women from fully participating in the Saudi Labour market. Most of our labour law and policies that all organisations have to follow reflect our culture and religion. For example: no organisation can recruit a lady without the permission of her Guardian; Ladies have to sign a pledge to follow a certain dress code (Abaya), to cover her hair etc.; segregation of offices, main entrances, meetings; some positions are only for males”.

After mentioning all these restrictions which are independent of the company's decision and which are in fact imposed from a higher societal level, the interviewee also indicated that, to a certain extent, despite all these restrictions, the company is willing to provide more hiring opportunities for women, noting: “our company is making sure that it implements the regulation to encourage hiring ladies.”

Another interviewee working for Company B Bank confirmed that the company's hiring policies could not be conceived independent of the Islamic Sharia laws. This implies that the company cannot assume full responsibility for the measures that define the process of hiring women, as it is not completely designed according to its intentions. However, the response from another interviewee suggests complete agreement with the religious restriction imposed by Islamic Sharia laws on women's employment and, that therefore,

the necessity to comply with them is not in dispute. In the view of this particular interviewee:

“When we laid down our employment policies, we implemented all rules and requirements of Islamic Sharia laws according to working rules in the Kingdom. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia initiated the right of work for women in all fields which are suitable to their nature and disposition, and bans employment of them in dangerous occupations or those which disagree with their nature. So we see that our commitment will not have any negative outcome but will only bring development to society through participation in work in safety and dignity according to Islamic values and general working ethics in the Kingdom.”

The perception that the state dictates what is an acceptable approach towards women employees is common amongst the employees of Company B Bank, as evident in other answers including one which suggested that: “The policy of employing women falls within the framework of legal and ethical standards laid down by the state” and another which stated: “The Kingdom, God bless it, established the rules which give everyone his/her right in a commensurate way such that to ensure modesty and adherence to our faith and ethics.” Despite what appears to be a general consensus that the considerations which apply to women in the hiring process and hiring decisions are different to those for men, there is also broad agreement that women’s actual and potential contribution to employer organisations is equal to that of their male counterparts. Hence, one interviewee noted:

“We are forever grateful to all our personnel both men and women for their effort irrespective of the different forms of employment”, “I see no difference whatsoever in what women do and men do at work so long as their aims are clear and they were given instructions.”

In response to the statement about unequal treatment of women in the context of employment and hiring, one of the unemployed interviewees cast their opinion not just in terms of perceptions about the unequal treatment of women, but in terms of the value of women as a human resource. Accordingly, in the opinion of the interviewee:

“The economy is to utilise the resources which are available in the best manner and without doubt the human resource is the most valuable resource. Supporting Saudi female graduates is crucial. She must get the necessary training and she should realise the basic concepts of working so that she can leave her mark on serving the Saudi economy. Presently there are directives which have been issued from our wise guardians to treat the Saudi woman with equality in the workplace as she has been given equal rights to vote and to nominate herself as a member in the consultative council.”

Despite the emphasis on efforts being made for men and women to be treated equally, the same interviewee also indicates that “job opportunities for a man who carries the same qualifications as mine are much greater. I feel that the best way forward is to establish government centres (offices) to recruit women.” Another unemployed woman supported the view that women have fewer job opportunities, saying: “the young men with same qualifications as mine can work in factories or some other workplaces but opportunities for women are fewer.” When asked how positive they feel about the employment situation for female graduates in Saudi Arabia, the representatives of the unemployed group indicated optimism, based on “some positivity because of the government pressure to include women but despite that and in most cases there is a big failure because of what we see from those whose job is to carry out these government directives”.

There seems to be consensus among company A employees who were interviewed that the percentage of female graduates out of the total number of Saudi nationals employed by the company is small. One interviewee said: "I don't think it exceeds 10% of the Saudi employees if not less. I believe that out of a workforce of 54,000, there are about 1,500 female employees, of which less than 500 of them are considered professional female employees." Another interviewee thinks that the proportion is "less than 20%. We' he goes on, 'have 18 men out of 22 Saudi graduates, which accounts for 81.8%. Female graduates may be 15%, around 3%." Yet, another interviewee admitted: "I do not have the exact figure about', but the same interviewee goes to say: "I assume that female Saudi nationals represent 5 to 6 % of the total workforce. Females compose about 5% of the workforce whom are graduates". The apparent inconsistency between these estimates suggests that the numbers are not likely to be very accurate. However, they may be useful indicators of the current situation regarding the number of graduate women employed by Company A.

Despite these low estimates of numbers, interview findings also reflect a common belief that the company is very supportive of the employment of female graduates. Hence, the view of one employee that: "It [Company A] is very encouraging towards the employment of female graduates within the country. It has launched several programmes to help women achieve professional success by training them and we believe in the capabilities of female graduates within Saudi Arabia and when it comes to hiring, gender is not a factor to consider, except in hazardous jobs." With the exception of one interviewee, who expressed a significantly different view that: "some think we have too many females in my department", most interviewees express the belief that the company is open to the employment of female graduates in the country. The fact that it is supportive of female employment, but has such low numbers of female graduate employees, might indicate that the company is either at a point where it is considering changing its approach towards the

employment of women graduates, or, that it [the company] considers the jobs it offers to be more suitable for men than women.

The credibility of this assumption can be further explored through analysis of responses to the interview question: “how valuable a contribution do interviewees think female graduates can make to the organization?” The answers in response to this question can be separated into two main categories. On the one hand, there are those indicating that it would be incorrect to separately discuss the value of the contribution of women from that of men, as they should be regarded as being equally important and valuable. On the other hand, there are responses that involve efforts to discuss the contribution of female graduates.

The responses that pertain to the first category tend to highlight the necessity of applying equal treatment to employees, regardless of gender, because, as one interviewee said: “I don’t think there is a difference between male and female. I believe whoever deserves the job should get it regardless of the gender. Yet I can see that females are more creative sometimes than males.” Some of those who subscribe to the perspective of no difference between the genders in relation to employment claim to be offended by a question that suggests a potential difference between women and men employees, because “a female employee is no different than a male employee in terms of capability. We bring different perspectives and styles of management and leadership and communication. The question in itself is offensive to me and quite backward.”

For one respondent who takes a view of a unique value which women bring to the workplace, “females would make a highly valuable contribution to the company”. Therefore, the respondent continues; “it is important to encourage hiring females and also encourage their professional development and progress throughout their careers.

They would make valuable contributions since they would balance operations within the organization gender wise. Also, they would bring different capabilities and creative talents to their roles than males would and keep the business fresh and innovative.” For another respondent:

“Females can do jobs as males can. Gender matters in some specific jobs. For example, a construction worker to me would preferably be a male employee considering males being physically stronger. I would also consider a female employee to lead a children’s nursery where females are closer to children than males. Both genders can do both, but there is a preference in certain jobs. Most jobs can be done by both genders. It is healthier to not discriminate by gender and look for qualifications that will add more value to the company. Females lead countries such as Pakistan. This proves that they can compete with males in business.” And “big value could be added to the organization since female employees prove that she is competent and well equipped.”

The responses from employees of interviewees from company C are, to a certain extent, similar to those provided by the employees from company A. Apart from a single answer suggesting 35% female composition of the workforce, the general view of the female composition of the company’s workforce is consistent with that of company A, ranging from 14% to 25%. One interviewee claims: “Current female percentage in company C is 14% of all Saudis, aiming to reach 16% by end of 2013. Another respondent suggests “around 15%” and yet another claims that “at present, we have 18% Saudi females from our total staff and almost 80% of the female staff have a Bachelor’s degree.” Despite these low numbers, employees also describe company C as a company, which supports the employment of female graduates. According to one of the interviewees, the company is:

“Very supportive, as it’s the current direction of the government plus as part of company C diversity policy. We are expanding on hiring female graduates and this is an announced direction. Company C is very supportive of female employment.

It has been the leading bank in female employment not only by quantity but quality as well, with many key and senior roles managed by female Saudis. Moreover, company C recently sponsored a study about the employment of Saudi females under the patronage of His Excellency the Minister of Labour and my organisation's view is firm on the hiring of female Saudis, with a target to increase its numbers yearly."

The company's attested support for the employment of female graduates can be motivated by the trust it depicts with respect to the contribution women can make within the organisation. Company C employees describe women's involvement in terms of strong potential, because; "we believe a lot, a lot of female graduates (like males) have strong potential to grow and have senior roles within any organization. We believe that we should not restrict the selection due to gender issues which might cause wrong selections." With respect to educational background and specific skills, "female employees are as capable as their male colleagues. Hence, I believe they will add value in line with their educational background and skills' and, just as with the valuable contribution men bring to the company, the contribution of female graduates in the organisation is very valuable and it's increasing on a yearly basis"

As illustrated above, company C presents itself as an organization which is highly supportive of increasing the access of Saudi female graduates' access to the labour market. However, like company A and company B Bank, company C also considers its recruitment policies as not entirely their responsibility and, instead, attributes them to cultural, religious and state influence and directives.

When asked about the contribution of female graduates to the Saudi economy and whether men and women are equally treated within the workplace environment, the representative of the Council of Saudi Chambers answered that despite the efforts made to help and support them, women themselves should assume more responsibility in respect to their

employment situation. According to him, “it is important; I believe there are many efforts to help.

The rest is in the hand of the applicant. I still think the main support is from the applicant herself.” The underlying argument is that women should consider being actively involved in activities which could both help them acquire skills and prove their abilities to potential employers. The chamber’s representative also suggested that women should act responsibly and be aware of their ability to influence how Saudi women are perceived through the force of their personal example. Accordingly; “If she knows how to market her skills and abilities as a brand, do voluntary service, so people get to know her level of professionalism, she will get more than just a job at a firm. She will be asked to be a part of a bigger picture. That is how I did it and if it worked for me it will work for others.”

## **Discussion**

With respect to the labour market and employment situation of women in comparison to men, the findings of this study also lend weight to other research which shows that female graduates face prejudices ranging from job assignment and employment opportunities to wage differentials. In that regard, many qualified female graduates have been pushed to take low wage jobs such as office administration, personal assistant roles and domestic social services work. Prejudices lock female graduates out of lucrative jobs in the construction, energy and transport sectors of the economy (Kammer, 2013).

Some studies have shown that the prejudices facing female graduates arguably defy various theoretical explanations. First, the extent of religious and traditional influences on the Saudi labour market defies the definition of the market determines wages and jobs availability, based on the supply and demand of labour (Claydon and Thompson, 2010). Gender wage differences are not a unique Saudi Arabian phenomenon – for example, various ASHE reports (2010, 2013), show historically entrenched gender pay gaps. However, unlike the UK, where these are considered as socially unacceptable and subject



to legal challenge, this study, like some previous studies, views and analyses gender inequality in Saudi Arabia in the context of a wider social, cultural and religious context that sanctions and legitimizes such inequalities (World Economic Forum, 2013; Dawson, 2012). Second, the Saudi Arabian market does not seem to be responding adequately to the increase in supply of female graduates. This, again, is not in line with the neoclassical theories, which intimate that female graduates are able to compete fairly with their male counterparts (Brown and Nolan, 1988; Lipsey and Chrystal 1999). The increase in supply of female graduate should translate into an increase in female employment as a percentage of the total Saudi workforce.

The claim that the labour market is the place where the price of labour should be able to be set regardless of gender (Lipsey and Chrystal, 1999, 2007) is contested with the argument that the labour market is not entirely free and respective positions of the buyers and sellers of labour are also influenced by social and political factors (Burchill, 1976, 2008). In that regard, the complexities of social relations in Saudi Arabia should be borne in mind in any analysis of the prejudices against female graduates in employment. From a theoretical point of view, this must be seen in the context of critiques of the neoclassical theory being unable to embrace and address social factors including inherent prejudices and unequal distribution of power in society in general and, particularly in the employment relations.

From the perspective of the nature of society and especially social relations, Saudi women who wish to engage in formal employment begin from a very social and traditionally sanctioned disadvantage. Critiques of female labour market participation sometimes try to couch their arguments against women's employment with reference to their religious and social assigned roles and expectations and how these make them unsuitable for the formal workplace. Note, for example, the following comments by an employee of company C:

“Many females do not wish to be flexible in the working environment. Many social issues come in the way of work, for example working with men is perceived as

unacceptable. Also, females are often viewed to have a "high turnover" rate in organisations because when getting married or having children they tend to want to work less hours, unless it is extremely financially necessary”.

The result of the study generally indicates that it is difficult for females to secure employment across the industries as compared to their male counterparts. This trend, however, is very common among many Gulf States and Kingdoms (ILO, 2010). A more detailed level of analysis across the different organisations which participated in this study suggests that getting a job in the oil and gas market, where company A specializes, is more difficult for females than in the banking and financial sectors where company C and Company B specialize. It is also arguable that since it seems that females are having a more difficult time getting jobs than their male counterparts, then some form of prejudice could be said to exist across the organizations and industry sectors (Kammer, 2013). The relatively higher numbers of females who are unemployed provides some evidence that females experience huddles in securing job opportunities. The circumstances of gender prejudice and the stigmatization of women graduates is a matter that requires concerted efforts by respective gulf governments in order to address unemployment and emerging labour crisis (Fakeeh, 2009).

Indeed, a study (Saudi Arabia, 2010) which reviewed data in the Central Department of Statistics of Saudi Arabia revealed that 50% of workers were foreigners while the rest were locals, of which only 8% were female. The situation of local female employees is also similar to that of female foreign workers, who also make up only 7% of the total foreign workforce of Saudi Arabia (Saudi Arabia, 2010). The study indicates similar trends of low female employment across the entire Middle East and concludes that this unemployment issue among an increasing highly educated female population will have to be faced by the Saudi Arabian government as a matter of urgency (Saudi Arabia National Portal, 2010).

There are various theories which attempt to explain the findings discussed above. First, most employers often seek resilience traits from potential and existing employees in accomplishing tasks. This implies that many organizations find males to be more resilient and reliable than females, leading to complex labour issues (Williamson et al., 1975). Second, some organisations seek continuous labour development where they can maximize their productivity, eventually depending on employees who can manage task complexity (Milgrom and Roberts, 1992). Proponents of these arguments use them to argue against policies that prioritize the enhancement female employment and access to labour market opportunities on the grounds that women employees are less reliable and deserving of development because they are likely to raise issues like maternity leave and family-work life balance. The third theory, which flows from the second, is that employers are keen to improve the productivity of employees who commit to long-term engagement and are less prone to dysfunctional turnover (Doeringer and Piore, 1971). Since female employees are associated with social issues that make them susceptible to high rates of turnover and relatively low commitment, employers prefer males in some jobs.

Having discussed the relative potential or real bias that women are subjected to in the context of employment and job seeking process and allusion to strategies that may be applied to address these in order to improve women's employment opportunities and their potential to contribute to organizational and national development, the next section aims to analyse the potential effects of adverse experiences which women encounter when trying to enter the workforce market.

Essentially, the following section presents and discusses findings in relation to how female graduates react to unsuccessful attempts at labour market entry, including, the inclination to completely withdraw from labour market participation and, the tendency to regret pursuing further education.

In addition, the general difficulties which women face in trying to secure employment and the extent to which these account for their dismal numbers in the labour force are also assessed.

#### 7.4 DISAPPOINTMENT

All the aspects discussed previously are assumed to be helpful for describing Saudi women's experience when trying to obtain employment. The focus was mainly around the negative aspects which define their experience, because the intention was to provide a basis for identifying the main drawbacks of the current Saudi workforce market and, consequently, to indicate those issues which need to be further addressed both at state as well as company level and including what female job applicants can do themselves. The current section aims to examine how the real and/or potential negative experience influences women's performance on the job, their decision to remain in the labour market and, their attitude to higher education and/or professional development.

##### 7.4.1 Female graduates as a lost resource

In the pursuit of these aims and as indicated in Table 7.4.1a, participants in the questionnaire survey were also asked about their views on whether they were concerned that "female graduates who cannot quickly find work will choose not to enter the labour market in Saudi Arabia and their skills will be lost".

TABLE 7.4.1A: UNEMPLOYED FEMALE GRADUATES BECOME LOST RESOURCES

Variable Group	Group Panel					Frequency (valid)	% (Valid)	Mean	Standard deviation
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed				
Disagree Strongly	10	7	12	24	24	77	5.7	3.9259	1.92064
Disagree Slightly	11	7	9	37	48	112	8.3		
Neutral	29	26	25	61	41	182	13.5		
Agree Slightly	59	71	84	103	204	521	38.6		
Agree Strongly	86	47	53	98	173	457	33.9		
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100		

As reported above, an overwhelming, 74.5% of respondents indicated that they either slightly agree or strongly agree with the sentiment that “female graduates who cannot quickly find work will choose not to enter the labour market in Saudi Arabia and their skills will be lost”. 13.5% are neutral and 14% disagreed slightly or strongly. Furthermore, the same pattern is reflected at organisational level, with the majority of respondents across the different group panel agreeing either strongly or slightly with the statement. The mean value of 3.9259 indicates that more than half of the participants agree that “female graduates who cannot quickly find work will choose not to enter the labour market in Saudi Arabia and their skills will be lost”. The data further shows that those employed in local government appear to be more in agreement with this position than those from other companies. Given that there is also a general view that women are seen to contribute significantly to the economy of Saudi Arabia, it is important that concerted efforts are put in place to make sure that important skill sets are not lost.

TABLE 7.4.1B: KW TEST ON UNEMPLOYED FEMALE GRADUATES BECOME LOST RESOURCES

Group (Control Variables)	Group Categories	Mean Rank	Test	Asym p- Sig. (p)
Company	A B C Local Government Unemployed	735.67 670.22 661.16 616.33 696.24	KW Test	.004*
Age	18-24 25-34 35-44 45-60	710.22 645.39 713.76 782.06	KW Test	.003*
Level of Degree Education	High school Diploma Bachelor Master	1119.00 730.15 651.56 755.09	KW Test	.000*
Type of Employment	N/A Part-time Full-time Flexible working pattern	698.11 630.50 664.60 1074.64	KW Test	.001*
Period to gaining employment	One Month or Less Two to Three Months Four to Six Months Seven to Twelve Months Twelve months to two years Three years to five years Five years to seven years Seven years to nine years Nine years or more	723.92 694.23 571.51 720.50 639.57 658.47 800.60 781.39 623.33	KW Test	.000*

Note: (\*) Statistically significant at 5% level; (\*\*) Statistically significant at 10%

Table 7.4.1b examines the significance of control variables on the assertion: 'I am concerned that female graduates who cannot quickly find work will choose not to enter the labour market in Saudi Arabia and their skills will be lost.' The control variables are statistically significant at a significance level of 5%. Thus, denoting key differences between the responses directed at these control variables. The ranking of mean values varies between different group categories pertaining to the same control variable. For example, in the case of Type of employment, the mean rank of 664.60 shows that those working full-time have expressed a significantly different opinion from those working on a flexible schedule (1074.64).

### 7.4.2 Educational choices

Because the study also sought to make sense of the interplay between education (study undertaken) and difficulties faced gaining entry to the employment market, respondents were asked to offer their agreement or disagreement with the statement: if I had known the difficulties I would face gaining entry to the employment market I would not have undertaken my studies. The findings with respect to this statement are analysed and reported in Table 7.4.2a.

TABLE 7.4.2A: IF DIFFICULTIES IN GAINING EMPLOYMENT CAN DISCOURAGE FEMALE TO STUDY

Variable Group	Group Panel					Frequency (valid)	% (Valid)	Mean	Standard Deviation
	A	B	C	Local Government	Unemployed				
Disagree Strongly	123	118	99	166	197	703	52.1	2.3388	1.61277
Disagree Slightly	27	20	30	27	38	142	10.5		
Neutral	22	12	23	15	19	91	6.8		
Agree Slightly	14	5	14	47	90	170	12.6		
Agree Strongly	9	3	17	68	146	243	18.0		
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100		

As indicated above, most respondents (62.6%) noted that they either slightly or strongly disagreed with the statement, 6.8% remained neutral, 30.6% agreed slightly or strongly. There is a significant rate of agreement corresponding to two group panels, namely Local Government (a total of 115 respondents) and Unemployed (236 respondents).

The mean value of 2.3388 indicates that more than half of the participants disagree with that had they known the difficulties they would face gaining entry to the employment market, they would not have undertaken their studies.

TABLE 7.4.2B: KW TEST ON DIFFICULTIES IN GAINING EMPLOYMENT CAN DISCOURAGE FEMALE TO STUDY

Group (Control Variables)	Group Categories	Mean Rank	Test	Asymp. Sig. (p)
Company	A	559.81	KW Test	.000*
	B	484.24		
	C	621.60		
	Local Government	694.19		
	Unemployed	789.65		
Age	18-24	804.83	KW Test	.000*
	25-34	646.94		
	35-44	670.32		
	45-60	466.07		
Place of study	Graduated in Saudi-Arabia	691.91	KW Test	0.000*
	Graduated abroad	550.25		
Degree Qualification	Engineering	522.34	KW Test	.000*
	Health, Medicine	731.23		
	Education	761.22		
	Languages	587.67		
	Business Studies	596.61		
	Marketing	621.06		
	Human Resources	689.26		
	Creative Arts Media	579.47		
	Computer/IT	620.20		
	Law	587.83		
	Other	352.00		
Level of Degree Education	High school	1143.75	KW Test	.000*
	Diploma	710.88		
	Bachelor	685.89		
	Master	604.90		
Type of Firm	None	796.37	KW Test	.000*
	Saudi Firm	614.82		
	Multinational Firm	663.19		
Employment Sector	Public	643.63	KW Test	.000*
	Private	602.36		
	None	789.67		
Type of Employment	N/A	796.37	KW Test	.000*
	Part-time	697.63		
	Full-time	614.42		
	Flexible working pattern	757.95		
Period to gaining employment	One Month or Less	569.06	KW Test	.000*
	Two to Three Months	647.68		
	Four to Six Months	566.37		
	Seven to Twelve Months	730.43		
	Twelve months to two years	678.77		
	Three years to five years	729.17		
	Five years to seven years	828.31		
	Seven years to nine years	700.27		
	Nine years or more	810.24		

Note: (\*) Statistically significant at 5% level; (\*\*) Statistically significant at 10%

As indicated in the analysis of the control variables relating to the statement: “If I had known the difficulties I would face gaining entry to the employment market I would not have undertaken my studies” (Table 7.4.2b, above), overall, most respondents disagree that had they known about the difficulties they would face gaining entry to the employment market, they would not have undertaken their studies.



However, all control variables' p-values are below 0.05, implying that those pertaining to different group categories do not share the same opinion in relation to the statement evaluated by Table 7.4.2b. Moreover, the ranking of mean values varies between different group categories pertaining to the same control variable. For example in the case of Degree qualification, the mean rank of 522.34 shows that those with a degree in Engineering have expressed a significantly different opinion from those with a degree in human resources (689.26) or from those with a degree in Education (761.22).

There are many reasons why people pursue further studies. These could include; building self-confidence, gaining personal achievement through study, fulfilling one's ambition and, of course, increasing one's chances of gaining employment. As a result, it should not be surprising that difficulties of labour market entry may not be sufficient to dissuade people from pursuing further education. Notwithstanding and, for the purposes of this study, an attempt is made to expose the challenges faced by Saudi Arabia's Females and to assess the number who actually gain employment.

### **7.4.3 Challenges**

The discourse so far has considered some of the issues and challenges faced by females with regard to employment. However, the current study, in Chapter One, hypothesised that a relationship exists between the challenges which Saudi females face and their numbers in the workforce. To test this hypothesis, Table 7.4.3a presents findings in relations to survey respondents' views on whether the challenges Saudi females face in the labour market impact upon the actual numbers who are employed in the labour market.

TABLE 7.4.3A. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHALLENGES TO EMPLOYMENT FACED BY SAUDI FEMALE AND NUMBER GAINING EMPLOYMENT

Variable Group	Group Panel					Frequency (valid)	% (Valid)	Mean	Standard Deviation
	A	B	C	Local Government	Un-employed				
Disagree Strongly	0	1	1	0	4	6	.5	4.5256	0.74709
Disagree Slightly	3	6	2	1	3	15	1.1		
Neutral	15	12	7	39	54	127	9.4		
Agree Slightly	51	48	31	53	134	317	23.5		
Agree Strongly	126	91	142	230	295	884	65.5		
Total	195	158	183	323	490	1349	100		

As the table shows, the findings of the study reveal that nearly 90% agreed or strongly agreed that a relationship exists between the challenges which Saudi females face and the number who actually become employed in the labour market. Moreover, 9.4% of the respondents remained neutral and a mere 1.1% disagree slightly, while only 0.5% disagree strongly. The pattern is confirmed throughout all five-group panels. The mean value of 4.5256 indicates that the majority of the participants agree with the link described in the statement.

Furthermore, using the Kruskal Wallis statistical testing model, the study further confirms the hypothesis that a relationship exists between the challenges which Saudi Arabia's female face as part of employment practices, and the number who actually gain employment in the labour market. Given the findings of this study, the hypothesis posed has been supported and, in that respect, the findings of the study, in this regard, are consistent with studies that claim an association between historical gender inequality in Saudi society and women's economic power (Housmann, Tyson and Zahida, 2009; Metcalf, 2008; Moghadan and Senftova, 2005).

As indicated in Table 7.4.3b, examination of the results in terms of their relation with the control variables shows that all control variables are statistically significant at 5%

significance value, implying that those pertaining to different group categories do not share the same opinion in relation to the statement evaluated by Table 7.4.3b. The ranking of mean values varies between different group categories pertaining to the same control variable. For example in the case of Type of firm, the mean rank of 676.19 shows that those who work for Saudi firm have expressed a significantly different opinion from those who work for a multinational firm (738.73).

It follows from the preceding discussions that an examination of the extent of the impact of the adverse challenges that confront female graduates on their employment opportunities be carried out. In that regard, respondents were asked to express their agreement or disagreement with the statement that: “the challenges that educated women face in the employment market actually impact negatively on their employment opportunities”. The results of the findings are analysed and statistically presented in Table 7.4.3b.

TABLE 7.4.3B: KW TEST ON RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHALLENGES TO EMPLOYMENT FACED BY SAUDI FEMALE AND NUMBER GAINING EMPLOYMENT

Group (Control Variables)	Group Categories	Mean Rank	Test	Asymp. Sig. (p)
Company	A B C Local Government Unemployed	673.43 622.95 759.61 706.89 639.79	KW Test	.000*
Type of Firm	None Saudi Firm Multinational Firm	639.07 676.19 738.73	KW Test	.002*
Employment Sector	Public Private None	639.07 676.19 738.73	KW Test	.027*
Type of Employment	N/A Part-time Full-time Flexible working pattern	639.07 652.81 692.24 852.91	KW Test	.013*

Note: (\*) Statistically significant at 5% level; (\*\*) Statistically significant at 10%

In many ways, this statement and findings relate to and even replicate the findings in relation to the statement about whether female employees are subjected to prejudice both in the workplace and in the job seeking process.

This statement and the related findings are exhaustively discussed in Chapter 2, Section. This question is important because such prejudice could alienate female graduates who could be equally as qualified as their male counterparts.

Following an extensive presentation and discussion of the survey data on how female graduates are likely to react to labour market challenges and difficulties in securing employment, the following section presents and discusses the interview responses to the same question. In that respect, the aim is not only to provide a more in depth representation of views, but also to assess the strength of the survey data by way of triangulation with data collected through an alternative method.

### **Interviews**

Generally, the research shows that there is a significant relationship between the rate of unemployment amongst Saudi women, their own attitude towards the local workforce market, and the attitudes manifested towards them within the local workforce market. The answers provided by the participants to the semi-structured interviews do not only merely support many of the survey findings; they are also relevant for understanding the main aspects influencing this relationship.

When asked to present his views in respect to the rate of unemployment among Saudi female graduates the representative of the Ministry of high Education referred to several reasons for this, including:

“Lack of experience by civil servants in employing women and the community in general; lack of clear directives in the type of work for women and working conditions to be provided by the employer; desire for most women job seekers to work in government service instead of working in private sector because it is safer; and increasing mandatory requirements in relation to employing women putting pressure on private employers.”

It was considered extremely important to understand how representatives of the unemployed group perceive women's chances of obtaining employment. Interestingly, not all opinions expressed indicate that the representatives of this group believe that it is particularly difficult to gain access to employment. As one of the unemployed interviewees put it: "personally, I think it is not impossible for Saudi women to enter the job market, because now there are many companies which like to employ women because the old barriers have been mostly overcome and there are plans to enhance the involvement of women in future development plans." However, the majority does not share this view and many gave strong arguments as to why it is particularly difficult for women to get hired as opposed to men. In that regard, one interviewee noted:

"There is a lot of red tape and difficulties in internal procedures. I am a graduate in Islamic studies and in addition I've taken and successfully completed a one year course in computing and another year's course in English language. Despite all that I could not get employment. The reasons for that are because there are so many women graduates in the same line as me and the other reason is the lack of coordination between the Department of Higher Education and the job market."

Despite such strong negative views, most interviewees are optimistic about the employment situation for female graduates in Saudi Arabia. While some of the optimism derives from individual determination and aspiration "to take part in many different things because the reward would be taking part in the betterment of my country", much of it comes from the belief that "despite some failures due the attitude of those whose job is to carry out directives, government is putting pressure to include women in the labour market". However, it would be remiss to not report that others express a sense of personal disappointment and anger, because they think that: "in the reality in which we live, and despite all the great numbers of women graduates out of work, I am very angry and disappointed."

I am disappointed because there is no plan (i.e. national plan) or system to absorb all these number of girls. Such views, however, contrast with those whose claim that their “confidence is high and the reason for that is because of the new guidelines and directives which were issued to welcome the Saudi woman and to increase the percentage of women graduates in the workplace in order to take the country further into the future” and, that “the Kingdom now is going through an economic boom in all fields which makes one hopeful”.

Paradoxically, despite such expressions of optimism, many of the unemployed interviewees indicated that they do not see any change in employers’ hiring policies. As a consequence they describe employers’ approaches as being obsolete, “following the same old rules for so many years, and the old rules have never changed despite changing attitude and labour market.” In particular, some refer to the lack of flexibility, noting: “I see that employers are keeping the same old pattern of employment procedures and the working patterns are the same as before; same working hours and same rigid pattern as before. No one offered me flexible hours contract employment”.

To a significant extent, these views are in clear contradiction with those presented in the previous section where representatives of all three companies, Company B, Company A, and company C indicated their confidence in the companies’ positive attitude towards change, motivated by their intention to integrate more women employees. The unemployed group representatives’ perception of the employers’ attitude is, to a certain extent, the opposite of how they perceive the state’s involvement in reducing unemployment rates among women. Although there are some objections, their answers mostly depict trust in the government’s actions and in its support. The main points of appreciation refer to the government’s support for women’s education: “Women in Saudi Arabia enjoy free full education from primary to university, with all sorts of support including bursaries to pursue higher education whether inside the Kingdom or abroad”.

The main drawbacks identified refer to the inability of those responsible for the execution of government policy (civil servants), to rise to the level of trust awarded to them and to prove capable of appropriately assuming their responsibilities. As one interviewee stated:

“However, from what I can see the shortcoming stems from the services which allotted to discharge these directives and guidelines and they are the ones responsible for blocking the entry of Saudi women into the labour market and taking part in prolonging their entry.”

The answers provided by the representative of the Council of Saudi Chambers are also interesting in the sense that while they generally indicate a significant change of perspective and attitude towards women in the Saudi workforce market in the last decade, they also suggest that personal experience helps them understand that, although historically the situation has changed, compared to women in the Western world, it is more difficult for women in Saudi Arabia to gain employment. Hence, the representative of the Chamber noted: “It was hard at first in 2002 when I first moved back from the U.S after living there for 10 years. I believe it was hard because I did not know how the job search system worked in Saudi. I know how to find a job and work in the U.S but in Saudi back in 2002 it was different.” The same perception is described in respect of the potential cultural facets that might influence organisations’ attitudes towards female employees. The biased attitude is considered to characterize the past:

“As I said before, things have changed now. Cultural factors are not an obstacle anymore, at least I hope not. However, I did face some when I first moved back from the US. Some universities rejected my applications because I was a U.S graduate. I can tell that because the set of questions I was asked during the interviews implied that they thought I was Americanised, which I think I am NOT.”

The interviewee regards the employment situation of Saudi women with optimism due to both the efforts of the government and the shift of attitude among young Saudi women themselves. According:

“I think the mind-set of young Saudi women seeking jobs is shifting. With the help of government and semi-government agencies more young men and women are shifting their future aspirations to entrepreneurship opportunities. Look at the number of entrepreneurs of Women entrepreneurs in Riyadh, there is a big shift in numbers from 2000 to now.”

## **Discussion**

A thorough consideration of the different organisations, which participated in the study, reveals that the public sector company, Company A, seems to express fewer incidences of prejudice against female compared to company B Bank and company C. This could be due to the fact that as a public, state own company, the government could intervene more directly and forcefully in the context of ‘Saudisation’ and particularly the aspect of it which requires that all genders are offered equal opportunities for jobs.

The findings of this study also lend weight to other research, which shows that female graduates face prejudices ranging from job assignment and career development to wage differentials. In that regard, many qualified female graduates have been pushed to take low wage jobs such as office administration, personal assistants and domestic social services work (Kammer, 2013). Prejudices lock female graduates out of lucrative jobs in the construction, energy and transport sectors of the economy (ibid).

As highlighted elsewhere, arguably, the historical disadvantages that confront Saudi women in terms of employment opportunities and fairness at work, defy and challenge economic theories about the nature of the labour market both in terms of the supply –



demand relationship about labour and especially in terms of the role of the labour market as wage setter (Claydon and Thompson, 2010).

If anything, the findings which are presented and discussed underscore the critical role of institutions and social factors in the regulation of labour markets (Seifert and Ironside, 1995; Burchill, 2008). Saudisation, and particularly expressions of optimism that derive from beliefs about the potential outcomes of government intervention suggest that the Saudi labour falls much more within the institutional paradigm of the labour market than the neoclassical model (Brown and Nolan, 1988; Smith et al., 2002). With respect to the crucial issues of gender gap in employment opportunities, career progression and pay, to some extent, the Saudi situation mirrors some of what exists in developed Western economies. However, in terms of remedies, the underlying social and political factors that sustain these inequalities are much more deeply rooted in the Saudi social and political fabric and, therefore less amenable to legal and political challenges.

Overall, the previous two chapters, which respectively dealt with “findings on the labour market” and “findings on HRM and labour flexibility”, aimed to present the data obtained from the quantitative and qualitative approaches undertaken as part of this study. The findings were presented and discussed using a number of themes considered useful for providing detailed and accurate description of the phenomena of research. These themes relate to: public policy in relation to the labour market and employment; government; expectation about the outcomes of relevant policies; women’s pathway to finding jobs; preferences for flexible employment; gender differentiation and inequality; and disappointment, which refers to how women deal with labour market failure. All themes were considered relevant for obtaining a better understanding of the employment policy concerns and challenges of government, and how this affects both employers and employees in Saudi Arabia and, especially, the employment opportunities of educated Saudi Arabia women and the challenges they face in the workplace and in their efforts to secure employment.

In addition to detailed description of respondents’ views in the questionnaire survey as well as in the interviews, Chapter Six, “Findings on the labour market”, also presented and discussed the data on the salient aspects of the character of and factors that influence the labour market. In that regard, the socio-political context, which is considered to be the backdrop and context for the manifestation of certain characteristics of the labour market, is presented and discussed under the theme “Policy”.

Considering that the strategies defined and implemented in order to increase the number of female employees are directly connected to existing perceptions about the potential contribution, which women could make to the economy and development of Saudi Arabia, the respondents’ beliefs were sought both through the questionnaire and through the interview.

The majority of the participants (95%) expressed a firm belief that female graduates could indeed make a major contribution to the economy and development of Saudi Arabia. The relevant statistical data was supported by the detailed answers provided by the interviewees.

As the strength and success of government strategies aiming to support Saudi graduate women's inclusion in the labour market is highly dependent on how organizations themselves react to these measures, the respondents were invited to express their opinions regarding differences in employer attitudes towards men and women either as actual or potential employees. It was interesting to observe that more than 50% indicated they believe that organisations in the country are less committed to employing female graduates.

On the other hand, when asked whether they believe the government' is committed to supporting female employment, almost 60% attested that they believed this was the case. The findings indicate the respondents' lack of trust in local companies' commitment to hire female graduates. This is supported by the respondents' agreement with the statement: "Foreign multi-nationals are likely to hire Saudi female graduates than Saudi firms", with 56.8% agreeing. The survey findings with respect to this proportion are, however, contradicted by the answers of the representatives of all companies involved in the study.

Furthermore, it was also considered pertinent to analyse the respondents' expectations from the government, in order to understand the areas of current workforce market that need to be improved and what potential improvement strategies might be appropriate. The majority, about 92% of the respondents, indicated that they believe that although the government has proven that it is supportive of and committed to helping Saudi graduate women to obtain employment, it should do more to encourage firms to find ways to employ female graduates.

Furthermore, significant majorities, at 97% and 94%, respectively, think that the Ministry of Higher Education should do more to inform female graduates and prospective graduates of the way that more flexible working practices can aid them in entering the labour market and that the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education should collaborate on developing policies to encourage firms to adopt more flexible working practices.

The survey findings also indicated a crucial lack of flexibility in the current Saudi labour market, despite overwhelming evidence that increased flexibility is considered one of the main answers to reducing women's unemployment. Under the theme "Preferences", the findings support the hypothesis that rigidity corresponds to regulated labour markets and poor economic performance and that, therefore, practices of flexible employment should be developed.

The majority of the respondents agreed that more firms in Saudi Arabia should consider offering flexible working arrangements to female graduates to encourage them to enter and remain in the labour market, as flexibility in employment practices increases the employment opportunities of educated women in Saudi Arabia. In this regard, the findings indicate that respondents would appreciate offers of a range of flexible working arrangement including; annualised hours, flexi-time and job sharing. The majority also agreed that firms should offer part-time work to female graduates to make use of their skills.

Interestingly, with respect to gender differentiation there were no decisive trends to clearly indicate whether the respondents believe women employees are treated differently from men employees. However, the numbers indicating a balanced attitude towards gender differences are contradicted by some of the observations interviewees have made regarding this issue. There was only one question where the majority of respondents, 70%, agreed that women employees are treated differently than men and this is the response to whether they think it is more difficult for women than men to secure employment with Saudi firms

Throughout the two chapters, the opinions expressed indicated that Saudi graduate women need further support in order to obtain employment. In that regard, several suggestions were advanced, including the idea that: the government should do more to inform and encourage this group; that the firms themselves should become more open to hiring female graduates and; that their skills should be considered a valuable asset to be utilized. All these were discussed and, although the findings indicate general agreement that the Saudi labour market has evolved into a more tolerant environment in respect to women in recent years, there is also evidence that, nonetheless, the labour market is still governed to a significant extent by socio-cultural and religious rules which companies refrain from disobeying and use to deny full responsibility for the HR policies and attitudes they adopt with respect to the employment and treatment of women workers.

As mentioned above, flexible employment was presented and supported as one of the main changes which could benefit women employees and as the main motivator to encourage them to enter and remain in the labour market. However, it is also important to recall the observations of one of the interviewees representing the Council of Saudi Chambers, that in addition to all external support women might receive from both companies and the government, they should consider the strong impact their own attitude could have and their ability to prove they are indeed valuable assets for both the development of the companies they work for as well as for the economy of Saudi Arabia.

## CHAPTER 8 : CONCLUSION

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### 8.1 INTRODUCTION

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This chapter presents the main conclusions of the study in relation to the research aims and objectives and the hypothesis outlined in Chapter One. In that regard, the chapter is essentially an elaboration of the pictorial presentation of the framework of the linkages between the research aims, hypothesis and relevant chapters and conclusions. While preceding empirical chapters attempt to capture specific conclusions that are drawn from findings relating to specific questions, in addition to summarising the research with an overview of the respective chapters, this chapter outlines the broader conclusions in terms of their theoretical, policy and methodological implications.

The phenomenal economic development of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia since the discovery of oil in the in the late 1930s has been well documented. One of the manifestations of these developments is increased employment opportunity. However, as Mahdi (2007) indicates, the discovery of oil and the economic and social development opportunities which emerged from this also happened in a social context which was lacking in the requisite human resources capacity. Consequently, the Kingdom, like almost all of the Gulf Co-operation Council countries, is heavily reliant on foreign migrant labour. As a significant consequence, foreign workers have and continue to constitute a significant core element of the Saudi labour force.

However, heavy reliance on foreign and migrant labour in the context of increased investments in the development of indigenous human resources has become a major potential social concern. With an increasing youth population and increasing levels of educational and professional attainment, Saudi Arabia is confronted with potentially high levels of youth unemployment and underemployment (Ramady, 2010).

As pointed out in the introduction chapter, the Saudi state reacted to this potential social crisis with the introduction of a 25-year, three-pronged strategic employment plan in 2009, which at its core aimed to reduce unemployment among Saudi citizens through a policy of indigenisation and reduction in the numbers from foreign and migrant labour (ILO, 2010).

The broad view of unemployment among Saudi citizens however obscures the gender inequality which is inherent in Saudi society and, by extension, the Saudi labour market. In that regard, ILO (2010) data shows a significant gap, with male unemployment in 2009 at 3.7%, while female unemployment was estimated to be 19%, representing, increase rates of 0.2% and 6% respectively. More detailed data from the Saudi Central Department of Statistics and Information (CDSI) which analysed unemployment rates among four core groups: Saudi men, Saudi women, non-Saudi men and non-Saudi women; over the three year period 2006 – 2009, also showed, comparatively, a higher rate of unemployment among Saudi women (Aluwaisheg, 2013). The paradox (if you will), of these findings, is that while there is strong evidence of gender inequality in employment and employment opportunity in favour of males, educational data shows that Saudi females are outpacing Saudi males in higher educational attainment (Pavan, 2013; De Bel-Air, 2014).

This final chapter provides a summary of the thesis and focuses on highlighting the major contributions made by the study. The chapter begins by revisiting briefly the general research enquiry and objectives stated in the introductory chapter. It then presents synopses of the various chapters, before discussing the methodological implications and theoretical and practical implications of the findings. Following this, limitations of the study are identified, with suggestions for the direction of further studies related to the issues of inquiry. Finally, some final reflections on research experience are made.

To reiterate, the aims of this study are to assess the labour market situation of Saudi female graduates and, specifically, to explore the possibilities of flexible employment practices as solution to the current unemployment and general labour market situation of Saudi female graduates. As outlined in the introduction chapter, the nature of the inquiry, which is reflected in the hypotheses which the study sought to test, is four fold: first, it sought to explore the existence of any relationship between increasing flexible work patterns and increased employment of educated Saudi female graduates. Secondly, the study aimed to examine any correlation between the labour market and employment challenges of Saudi female graduates and their actual labour market participation rates. Thirdly, the research sought to assess the relationship between female educational attainment and employment opportunity in Saudi Arabia. Fourth, and finally, the study aimed to examine views regarding flexible employment and whether flexible employment practices can provide viable solutions to unemployment among Saudi female graduates.

To secure these aims and objectives, the study sought to address five key questions concerning: the nature and effectiveness of the institutional and regulatory frameworks which govern employment relations in Saudi Arabia; the major labour market employment policy concerns and challenges of government, employers and employees in Saudi Arabia; the presence and nature of flexible employment practices in Saudi Arabia and a determination of the contexts in which employers and employees are likely to offer and consider such offers and; crucially, whether and the extent to which labour flexibility constitutes a viable solution to the problem of unemployment (rather than underemployment) among educated Saudi females. The remainder of the introduction chapter is taken up with an outline of the proposed methodology used to address these questions and a general outline of the thesis.



Chapter Two presented general and more specific relevant background material. Accordingly, in addition to general geography, political and economic background material and information, the chapter provided and analysed information relating to the socio-cultural and labour market contexts which define, constraint and/or facilitate the labour market and employment status of women in general and female graduates in particular. It follows therefore that even whilst acknowledging the great strides which have been made in relation to female education and professional development (Yousif, 2011; Ramady, 2010), citing, for example, Murphy (2011), the chapter focuses significantly on the Saudisation agenda and argues that in order for Saudi Arabia to achieve sustained economic growth, social development and stability, public policy, including the Saudisation policy, must recognise and ensure greater engagement of women in the labour market.

Chapters Three and Four cover theoretical aspects, with a detailed and critical take on relevant extant theories and debates about the nature of the labour market and theories and debates regarding the concept of HRM as a model for managing people in organisations. Chapter 3 particularly focused on and provided a more expanded and nuanced analysis of indigenisation as a national labour market policy. In addition to extensive review of competing theories about the labour market and flexibility and flexible employment in different socio-economic contexts, Chapter Three also included extensive and detailed accounts and analysis (including in comparative analysis) of indigenisation with reference to various countries within the region. With respect to Saudi Arabia, the review involved analysis of the Saudisation policy, highlighting the challenges and arguments. In that respect, the chapter outlines the relative failure of the programme, arguing that despite the introduction of the second phase of the programme in terms of Natiqat in 1990 (Alsheikh, 2015), which includes allocation of specific numbers of Saudi nationals who companies must employ depending on their size, global factors such as the liberalisation of the global

movement of labour (Niessen, 2000 in Alsheikh, 2015) as well as local factors including the reluctance of employer to hire Saudi nationals and the lack of desire among Saudi citizens to work for private and foreign companies (Alsheikh, 2015; Khan and Varshney, 2013). With respect to the impact on female employment, evidence indicates that the desire to great more employment opportunities for Saudi women is undermined by social factors, such as gender separation, which limit labour market opportunities (Curley, 2013; Abu-Nasr, 2013; Murphy, 2011).

Chapter Four built on Chapter Three by locating the literature on the potential trajectory of developments of the Saudi labour market in the context of developments in the broader global context. The chapter therefore reviewed some of the literature about developments in the labour market in a global context and the implications of these for Saudi Arabia. Accordingly, the chapter revisited theoretical debates about the nature of the labour market and attempts to relate these to theories about selected HRM: pay, recruitment and selection. With respect to competing views of the labour market, the discussion focused on critiques of the neoclassical theories and, in particular, their inability to present coherent explanations for pay differentials and, therefore, arguments for robust explanations of the nature and dynamics of the labour market which embraces and acknowledges the impact of relevant institutions and actors. In analysis of the literature on the changing nature of labour markets in the past three decades, the discussions drew on literature to make comparisons between developing and developed economies and countries in terms of a decline in manufacturing and mining sectors in developed economies, with an increase (although small) in these industries in developing countries, and to highlight the implications of these developments in terms of flexible labour markets and flexible employment practices on a global scale (Kahn, 2012; Ingham & Ingham, 2011; Go et al., 2010; Barbieri & Scherer, 2009; Nolan and Slater, 2003).

These comparisons then provide the context for discussions about the character of the Saudi labour market (Cammatt & Posusney, 2010; Mellahi and Wood, 2000, 2005) and, in particular, evidence of flexibility and how it might apply to the labour market situation of female graduates in Saudi Arabia. Throughout the chapter, reference was made to the Saudi context, and sections related to work force demographics (Gassim *et al.*, 2012; Kataria and Sethi, 2013), the economic structure of the country and the legislative and governmental initiatives which have impacted on the construct and management of the labour market (Seiple *et al.*, 2013; Allam, 2012; Ali, 2009).

A critical aspect of the chapter concerns how the literature points out the contradictions at the centre of Saudi Arabia's reaction to globalisation and its implication for the labour market. In that regard, it is noted that whilst Saudi Arabia recognises and attempts to respond to globalisation by adopting some neoliberal policy interventions which define the globalisation process, it has also introduced protectionist policies, such as Saudisation, which are antithetical to neoliberal free market paradigm (Niessen, 2000).

Chapter Five covered the research design and methodological positions taken by the research. While acknowledging what is described as an 'acrimonious' research paradigm war in social science research between qualitative and quantitative methodologies (Denzin, 2009, p. 139; Denscombe (2008), this study follows Bryman (2006) and argues against methodological dogma, instead opting for a design and approach that is suitable for addressing the research questions in light of inevitable practical issues and circumstances.

Accordingly, the chapter argues for an alternative, 'third paradigm', mixed-methods approach (Denscombe, 2008). Without dismissing the significance of the need for any research undertaking to acknowledge the distinguishing criteria of traditional philosophical positions about social research, the chapter focuses on arguments which stress the need to

benefit from the complementary strengths and manage the respective weaknesses of the competing paradigms (Baumard and Ibert, 2001). Thus, the proposition of a design that allows for triangulation of both data collection methods and data sources. In that respect, as well as using interviews and survey methods, the chapter identified the range of data sources including; public and private organisations, individuals (both employed and unemployed) from both genders as well as publicly accessible government owned and managed databases. The final parts of the chapter account for the potential limitations and weaknesses of the research approach. In particular, the limitations of the main research instrument, SurveyMonkey, is acknowledged both in terms of the ethical concerns associated with it (Buchanan and Hvizdak, 2009), but also for the fact that potential respondents may not have access to requisite technology (Murthy, 2013).

Chapters Six and Seven cover the empirical findings of the study. Chapter six presents and discusses findings in relation to views on labour market and employment policy, government expectations in relations regarding the outcomes of policy, and women's employment seeking behaviour. The findings draw from survey and interview data as well as existing publicly accessible databases to generate data which is further elaborated on to document and analyse views on flexibility as a solution to female graduate unemployment.

Following the presentation of background information in the form of the general profile of the three companies targeted and the demographic profile of the research participants, the chapter begins with an analysis and presentation of perspectives on existing labour market and employment policy. Following Howlett and Ramesh (1995), the chapter advances the general argument that public policy is often driven by interrelated concerns for self-preservation and a desire to address a common problem or provide a public good. In the case of Saudi Arabia and for the purposes of this study, the key public policy on which views are sought and expressed concerns the Saudisation agenda.

In this regard, although the findings suggest that Saudisation represents a concern for self-preservation against potential social unrest which could result from high levels of unemployment, there is also evidence that it is viewed as representing a genuine and viable solution to the problem of unemployment in general and, in particular, female graduate unemployment. Consequently, its failures are not always associated only with contradictions in the state's response to challenges arising from globalisation and its impact on the labour market, but also as a consequence of the resistance of employers to the hiring of Saudi nationals. With respect to expectations, although empirical findings suggest concern for self-preservation and, thus, consistency with the literature which views indigenisation as a means to avert social unrest which could result from high levels of youth unemployment (Ramady, 2010; ILO, 2010, IMF, 2013), the findings also suggest genuine belief that the policy will enable female Saudis to effectively contribute to the economic and social development of Saudi Arabia. The objective for adopting the theme of 'women's ways of seeking employment', in view of the research aim of assessing the viability of flexible employment as a solution to female graduate unemployment, is to assess the extent to which females consider flexible employment alternatives. Accordingly, the discussions draw on views regarding whether female job seekers have registered, or considered registering with temporary employment agencies as a way of getting into the labour market. The findings indicate that a majority (albeit, a small one – about 42%) have done this. This finding suggests that although there is some indication of popularity for such modes of labour market entry, they remain relatively an unpopular choice for most Saudi citizens (Wood and Budhwar, 2002).

While Chapter Six focused on empirical findings in relation to specific public policy and how female graduates navigate labour market entry, Chapter Seven focuses on the implications of the nature of the Saudi labour market for HRM strategies and practices and firms, and how this is reflected in attitudes to labour market flexibility and the offering of

flexible employment alternatives. The discussions are therefore framed around themes about educated women's preferences in employment and their perceptions regarding their chances of securing their preferred employment. These findings are presented and discussed in relation to views on gender differentiation in relation to labour market access and opportunities, the drawbacks of existing policy and the current employment strategies and practices of firms. Although the findings show increase in female labour market participation, they also suggest significant draws, which are consequences of wider social factors. These include gender separation and inequality, but also a lack of clear consensus about the nature and relative value of flexible forms of employment. These views are evident in the responses of female graduates, who claim ingrained gender discrimination that is legitimised and sustained by social and cultural norms, including the law, employers and government representatives, who acknowledge the valuable role which women can contribute but also cite wider social factors as reasons for existing HRM and employment practices.

Having presented a general overview of the thesis, with a restatement of the research aims and objectives and brief summaries of the chapters, the following section revisits the methodology and outlines the methodological implications of the study.

### 8.3 METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

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The choice of mixed methods reflects a clear desire not only to determine the correlations between relevant variables, including gender, employment etc. (Baumard and Ibert, 2001), but also to gain in-depth understanding of the phenomena of inquiry (Symon and Cassell, 2012). Although there is an abundance of literature on gender relations in Saudi Arabia (e.g. Booz & Co, 2010; Ramady, 2005, 2010; Murphy, 2011), the literature on flexible employment and especially on the labour market problems of female graduates seems rather limited.

Consequently, while quantitative, deductive research methodology and methods may suffice for data on numbers and inferences on correlations between gender and rates and types of employment, it requires an inductive approach to contextually describe the prevalent and peculiar characteristics of the Saudi labour market and the underlying broader sociocultural and institutional factors which account for these characteristics and the resultant implications for the labour market situation of female graduates.

For example, an understanding of the divergent views regarding what constitutes flexibility can only be achieved through interviews which seek deeper meanings of what would otherwise be surface and caricature notions of flexibility in the context of employment. Similarly, accessing and developing a more nuanced view of social factors which constrain women's labour market participation and entrench gender inequality in employment and the workplace requires a methodology and methods which enhance understanding of issues such as rationale for gender separation and its implications for gender relations in general and in the context of employment and workplace relations.

In a nutshell, the qualitative aspects of the study have enabled a more in-depth and subtle explanation of cultural complexity in the Saudi context and helped to enhance understanding of phenomena which from, say, a Western mind set, could be dismissed as archaic and irrelevant to what pertains in a formal workplace (Chang and Lu, 2007). Notwithstanding, the study also underlines the value of quantitative, deductive methodology and methods in terms of efficiency in providing summaries, easy analysis and presentation of relevant issues from large and varied data sources and participants. Despite criticism of simplified and compressed standardisation of responses and categories based on researchers' preconceived views (Mazzetti and Blenkinsopp, 2012), the study has shown that statistical analysis and presentation of relevant variables is useful for understanding how different and related variables coexist to give a better and more nuanced explanation and clarity to phenomena (Baumard and Ibert, 2001).

The study has underlined the strength of mixed methods by showing that while qualitative methods (interviews) can help reveal and explain a phenomenon as embedded in its specific context (Miles et al. 2014), quantitative, deductive paradigms can reveal the same phenomenon as it exists in relation to other phenomena and, therefore, help provide a more holistic explanation of the phenomenon which forms the primary issue of inquiry. This study makes this claim while acknowledging the limitations of the method of quantitative data collection.

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#### 8.4 THEORETICAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

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Theoretically, the findings of this study have, in many ways, validated some of the research about gender relations in general and its implications for economic status of women in Saudi Arabia (Booz & Co, 2010; Murphy, 2011; AlSheikh, 2015). However, on the specific issue of the employment problems faced by female graduates, and whether and to what extent flexible employment presents a viable option in the arsenal of potential solutions, the findings in relation to concepts of flexibility and attitudes to flexible employment alternatives, views on Saudisation and the HRM strategies and practices of employer organisations suggest that the various factors which shape the context and therefore influence practice are more complex than most of the literature indicates.

In terms of the concept of and attitudes to flexible employment: although the findings indicate a general tendency to view flexible employment as a viable alternative, respondents' views on the concept of flexibility in the context of employment and HRM, even among HR professionals, at the least lacks a clear consensus and at worst reflects significant conceptual confusion. For example, there is a clear tendency toward a view of most flexible employment which is not expressed in terms of various practices, but instead, as simply a locational issue (working from home). To that end, the research suggests an urgent need for studies to focus on defining the flexible employment embedded in the Saudi sociocultural context.



Despite the many critiques of Saudisation (ILO, 2010; SAMA, 2008), the findings show that there is generally a positive view of the policy. In that respect, although there is some indication of a cynical view of the objective of the policy as a means of self-preservation, there is also a strong broader consensus that Saudisation represents a potentially viable labour market policy intervention to address unemployment among Saudi youth and female graduates. In those terms, the study supports the arguments advanced by the government (Wood & Pudhwar, 2005; Ramady, 2005). However, there is also strong consensus that, in spite of the updating of the policy by way of Natiqat, which includes specific quotas for companies depending on size (Alsheikh, 2015), the policy lack sufficient support from employers and requires strong enforcement. In that respect, one of the policy implications of the study is the suggestion that Saudisation may be helped by the incorporation of incentives for employers to consider flexible employment alternatives which are directed at potential female employees.

In terms of institutional theory, isomorphic pulls and the HRM practices of organisations, one of the underlying assumptions informing this study is the idea that one of the main factors which accounts for the disadvantaged labour market situation of women in general and, therefore, female graduates, is formed by the social and cultural norms which legitimize and sustain a system of gender relations which privileges men over women in almost all spheres of society.

To that end, there is significant reference to literature which argues as such, and the findings significantly support this stream of literature. Consequently, some argue that even though Saudi Arabia has made significant strides in female education (Clark, 2012), with evidence of females outpacing males in postgraduate academic attainment (see Figure 2.5, Chapter 2, IMF, 2013), the nature of social and gender relations in Saudi Arabia has continued to undermine women's educational attainment, including labour market access (Booz & Co., 2010; Aljughaiman & Grigorenko, 2013; Crawley *et al.*, 2013; Alsheikh,

2015). Both Aljughaiman and Grigorenko (2013) and Alsheikh (2015) argue that despite evidence of increasing female educational attainment, social and cultural factors limit the subject areas open to females and, as a result, their labour market access. Alsheikh (2015) notes that areas with high and better employment opportunity are not adequately open to women.

The findings of the study show that in relation to the HRM strategies and practices of organisations, employers have often cited social and cultural factors as explanations for their inability to consider hiring female graduates. In theoretical terms, such excuses find support in institutional theory, which suggests that organizational decision-making is not merely an outcome of strategic choice, but also of powerful forces existing in the wider socioeconomic context, within which organisations exist and operate (Dimaggio and Powell, 1983). They refer to these forces, which may also reside within the organisation, and how they influence organizational decision-making as ‘Isomorphic pull’ and argue that the process can take the form of three different ‘isomorphic pulls’ (also, see Rubery and Grimshaw, 2003).

These pulls could include ‘*coercive isomorphism*’, meaning pressures which emanate from external institutions such as the state and social and cultural expectations; ‘*mimetic isomorphism*’, whereby organizational decision-making is influenced by the behaviours of competitors, or; ‘*normative isomorphism*’, which involves a more passive process of pressures from professionalization of functions and practices transmitted through educational and professional institutions (Dimaggio and Powell, 1983).

Employers’ views suggest that coercive isomorphic pulls account for their inability to develop and adopt HRM strategies and practices (including flexible alternatives) which might increase employment opportunities for females. However, the study also shows this to be an incomplete explanation, because the preponderance of views from other sources also suggests alternative isomorphic pull from within organisations taking advantage of

Saudi Arabia's desire to fit into the global economy and, therefore, play by the free market edicts of global capitalism.

Policy wise, therefore, to address the labour market problems of female graduates, the Saudi government needs to confront two sources of coercive isomorphism; indigenous sociocultural pressures and the pressures of global capitalism.

#### **8.4.1 Development of a Conceptual Framework**

This section presents the conceptual framework of factors which affect women's level of participation in the labour market. It draws heavily on the literature review as outlined in Chapters Two and Three, as well as in the findings from the views of respondents who participated in the questionnaire survey and the interview stages of the current study. The conceptual framework that is presented below aims to delineate the linkages between relevant core issues raised in the extant literature and the elements of empirical findings; and presents how they apply to the research concerns.

Ressing et al. (2009) report that systematic literature reviews are a useful tool with which to form a picture of contemporary analysis and perspectives regarding the topic of interest, as well as enabling previous studies to be evaluated for their contribution and usefulness. In this current study, the systematic literature reviews and meta-analyses enabled the research findings and treatment effects obtained in different individual studies to be summed up and evaluated.

Through a systematic analysis of the literature review and working on the frequency of citation of the challenging factors, a group of six (6) challenging factors were observed. These factors, which are below, reveal a host of challenges that relate to each other and to the issues that rose in the empirical findings concerning the labour situations of female Saudi graduates. The personal factor: self-efficacy, motivation and attitude towards work.

1. The socio-cultural factor: women and work from a cultural, societal and religious perspective.
2. The educational factor: education and training and how relevant these are to market needs.
3. The legal/political factors: labour policies, rules and regulations and the place of women in the decision-making process.
4. The organisational factor: role of organisational structures and attitude of the management.
5. The economic factor: needs of the labour market and the place of women.

Before presenting theoretical linkages between these factors, with some reference to literature and references to relevant sections of the thesis, a brief and general presentation of how these various factors link to each other and to the research concerns is given.

The framework suggests, and rightly so, that the core research concerns the linkage, albeit inverse relations, between the rise in female educational and profession attainment and the female labour market. This is reflected in the fact that these are represented in the centre of the structure. The framework suggests that the core research concerns are influenced, for better or worse, by a number of factors – economic, personal, socio-cultural, educational, legal/political and organisational. These linkages are in many ways supported by the literature as well as empirical findings. Accordingly, the background chapter provides evidence which supports the underlying assumption of the inverse relationship between Saudi educational and labour market policy in relation to female graduates. The literature provides evidence of the relevance of socio-cultural and legal/political factors to explaining this ambiguity between the goals of educational policy and the constraining effects of social factors on female labour market participation.

Empirical evidence in the form of participant perspectives on workplace gender inequality and references to religious dictates all support the underlying assumption of the inverse correlation between levels of education and professional attainment and labour market access.

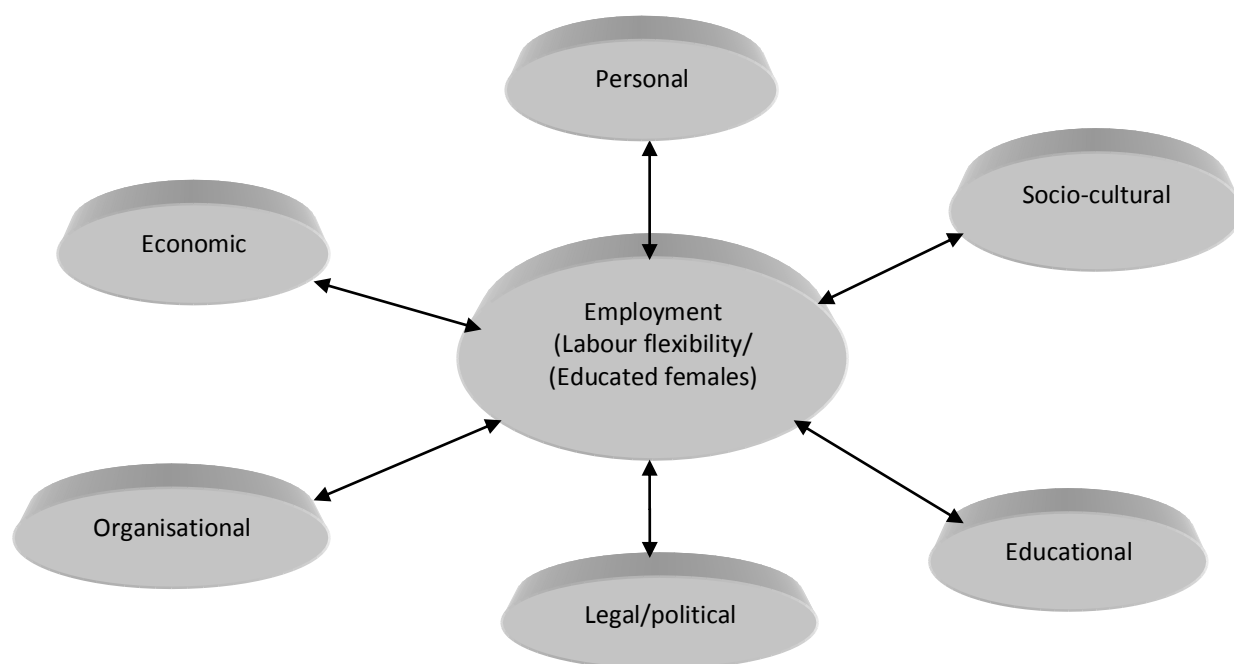


FIGURE 8.1: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: CHALLENGING FACTORS AFFECTING EDUCATED WOMEN'S LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOUR MARKET IN SAUDI ARABIA

Similarly, economic factors inform the analysis in terms that are laid out in the background chapter. In that regard, Saudi Arabia's economic situation has facilitated and enables support of an educational policy which accounts for the increased levels of female educational attainment. That policy also has potential social implications which could ensue from the increased exposure of increasing numbers of Saudi women to other social contexts, where gender relations are fundamentally different to those pertaining in Saudi Arabia. At the same time, the implications of globalisation in the form of an influx of MNCs and related trends in policy diffusion (which can also be attributed to the education of increasing numbers of Saudis in Anglo-American academic and professional institutions) have resulted in the introduction of practices which have the potential to offer

credible solutions for the problem of the research. Economic factors also have organisational implications and are, therefore, related to organisational factors.

Both literature and empirical evidence indicate the importance of organisational factors. The literature indicates the diffusion of Western HRM practices into the Saudi context through, among other things, the activities of MNCs (e.g. Budhwar and Melliki, 2005; Mellahi and Wood, 2005; Brewster, 1995). However, there is also literature that suggests that, notwithstanding the impact of globalisation, organisational level practices and interaction continue to be influenced by the peculiar Saudi social factors (Abbas et al., 2008; Ali, 2008, 2010).

The implications of social factors for organisational factors is clearly supported by empirical findings, and are evident in employers' claims of being constrained by social norms that, for example, require them to invest in gender separate working spaces. These limitations are also a consequence of political/legal factors, because as a theocracy, there is no real distinction between social norms and legal/political factors, which are both based on Sharia.

The interrelatedness of these various factors is central to determining the options that are available to individuals and, therefore, the personal factors which are also included in the conceptual framework. Social factors that derive from teachings and principles of Islam and Hadiths define individual and collective conception and actions in Saudi Arabia. As a result, they form the glue that keeps the economic, organisational, political/legal factors, which in turn define and limit individual factors, together.

The conceptual framework, as discussed in the preceding paragraphs, generally identifies the core factors that emerge from the literature and empirical findings that influence the core concerns of the study. The remaining sections attempt to elaborate this interrelationship with reference to theory and relevant sections of the thesis.

A number of writers have considered the importance of personal factors (self-efficacy, motivation and attitude towards work) on participation in the labour market.

Sadi and Al-Ghazali (2012) note the importance of motivation and attitude to work as vital in the labour market. In the same vein, Jenkins (2012) and Blyton and Jenkins (2011) note the importance of self-esteem and pride in being employed and contributing to the economy.

In Section 2.3 of the thesis, discourse around the significance of socio-cultural factors and their impact on graduate employment for Saudi females was presented. Rutledge et al. (2011) and Kattan (1991) emphasise the focus on early marriage and the general acceptance of the notion that wives need to be supported by their husband in the Saudi cultural context. It was argued that women who might choose to follow an academic path rather than the expected route of marriage and family might risk the chance of a choice of husband.

Hamdan (2005), states that a study of women and education in Saudi Arabia must take into account the social and political events in recent years. Interestingly however, the UNDP (2011) report entitled; *Arab development challenges report 2011* notes that “the institutional weakness constitutes one of the most important causes of socio-economic and political exclusion in the Arab region” (p. 2).

Indeed, from the interviews conducted in the current study, there is ample evidence to suggest the impact of culture on female graduate employment. The twenty-eight interviewees in the study were asked to offer their view on the following question: Have you noticed any cultural facets (religion, social values etc.) that have affected which organisations you can apply to as a female graduate, and the likelihood of being taken on? The following are some of the key comments offered by the interviewees: “Yes, there are cultural ethics and I do not think they are “religious” but this is to do with the way society

operates, and feel safe and comfortable to operate, and the common Arab custom on which Islamic faith was built; incidentally it encourages work and productivity”.

“Yes, but it will not necessary impact the employment of women to a great extent as much as trying to protect the integrity of the Muslim woman. I think such cultural misgivings will help to protect women’s rights and duty through respecting her Islamic integrity in the place of work”.

“There are no religious objections to work, however, there are social requirements which are borne out of social customs and moral ethics which are well established and are related to how and what is acceptable for the Saudi working woman. But the religion of Islam always calls and encourages work and endeavour”.

The above comments from a sample of the interviewees lend weight to the significance of socio-cultural issues as explained by Rutledge et al. (2011) and Kattan (1991). It is important that these variables are considered in any policy or guidance associated with addressing female graduate employment in Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, arguably the more essential point from these views is that they seek very clearly to shift any responsibility for the situation away from religious or traditional cultural factors. In fact, the refutation given by the interviewees here to the notion that these factors limit their working options contrasts with the assertion by higher management personnel that they are limited by religion and culture in recruiting women. Further, this is also in contrast to certain literature considering the Islamic context as it impacts upon women’s position (for instance Booz and Co., 2010; Crawley et al., 2013; and Murphy, 2011).

Another important challenging factor is education. Rugh (2002) notes that the “Saudi educational system is under a lot of pressure as its roots and commitments are ideological and religious (i.e. connected to the past and old values). But its future lies in its ability to meet the demographic and economic demands of their changing society”.



Similarly, Prokop (2003) observes that the major challenges faced by the Saudi general education system are twofold.

Firstly, there are issues with the quality of education, and secondly, the labour market needs to be in a state of constant expansion for Saudis, as the Kingdom's population keeps growing rapidly. He also opines that the latter requires increase in the proportion of native Saudis in the workforce, the introduction of economic reforms to attract investment and encouragement for the participation of the private sector in employment creation.

Although the situation has got better since the report was published, in 2007, UNESCO estimated that 20.6% of Saudi women over the age of 15 were illiterate. The report went further to note that, with only 3% of female illiterates finding an active role in the labour market, 1 million Saudi women are unable to enter the workforce because of their lack of education or appropriate skills.

Legal and political factors play an important role in the participation of female graduates in the labour market in Saudi Arabia. In her article, AlMunajjed (2010) states that “although Saudi laws and regulations based on Sharia guarantee that a woman should work, they stipulate that she should work in an appropriate environment; that is, not mixing with men or being exposed to harassment”. AlMunajjed (2010) goes on to opine that sex segregation by occupation is therefore prevalent in Saudi Arabia. Women end up being concentrated in certain professions which are seen “as feminine and remain in less distinguished position than men” (Kaufman, 2004). The Saudi eighth five year development plan (2005 – 2009) notes that 85% of all working women are in the education sector. The breakdown of the participants of the questionnaire survey in this study into types of employment lends weight to this position. The UN Committee on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) published a report in 2007 stating that to date, “women in Saudi Arabia remain victims of institutionalised and omnipresent discrimination across every societal arena”.

The report recommended that “Saudi legislation should be amended so as to bring [it] into line with an international treaty on women’s rights that the Kingdom signed in 2000 (The Economist Intelligence Unit Ltd, 2008).

The economy plays an important role in the employment situation for educated Saudi females, and it is inextricably linked to education and skills acquisition and productivity. Similarly, the type of organisation (Public and private/foreign) plays a significant role.

Baki (2004) contends that it is not possible to be effective in overcoming the insufficiently productive character of the economy in the Kingdom at present without effectively promoting the inclusion of female graduates in the workforce. This same point is echoed by Cordesman (2003). HHE [Baki] (2004) additionally states that constraints upon female activities as part of the workforce, as well as in the educational arena have the effect of rendering all the efforts in these areas a force for maintaining the present situation with regard to the avenues available to women. Viviano, (2003) has made similar points by observing that young Saudi women “took their bachelor’s degree in Islamic Philosophy or in whatever minimal degree is needed for a public sector career. The reality is that the educational system is not preparing women (or men for that matter) for the educational needs of their kingdom’s economy, specifically for the private sector” and “such a lack of appropriate occupational education has created the need for migrant workers in Saudi Arabia”.

Looney (2004) has argued that the education system must focus on the needs of the private sector; this is where new jobs are likely to be created. Thus, by changing the focus of education to fit the needs of the private sector, this area will be enabled to expand, as well as an enhancement of research and development, in such a way as to depend more heavily upon males and females from Saudi Arabia.

As Saudi Arabia expands its economy and its private sector, this may well lead to a relaxing of policy on labour which will offer an increased chance for females to participate (Baki, 2004), expected to happen as Saudisation becomes effective and the private sector expands its intake of Saudi nationals. The data obtained from the present study has indicated that foreign companies are more likely to implement flexible employment practices than Saudi-based companies. The next subsections will consider by whom and how the framework could be used, as well as the validation of the framework.

The conceptual framework offers an opportunity for policy makers, employment organisations and champions of female employment in Saudi Arabia to improve their awareness and understanding of the main challenges that impact on graduate employment. These should also inform effective decisions. In this study, the relative significance of the challenges has not been evaluated and established. It is argued that the extent to which one challenge is more of a concern than another will differ by context. Notwithstanding this, there is ample scope for a study which investigates the relative significance of these six factors in differing circumstances and contexts. Similarly, a decision support system (DSS) could be created to support decision makers and also to provide specific guidance on how each factors might be addressed in differing context.

There is also scope to indicate the key challenges identified in this study within appropriate undergraduate and postgraduate curricula as part of improving awareness and understanding given the changing labour market in Saudi Arabia.

#### **8.4.2 Validation of the conceptual framework**

It is evident that great care should be taken to decide on the people who will validate the framework. It is also appropriate that participants in the validation process must have understanding of employment issues in Saudi Arabia as they pertain to unemployed female graduates. It was important that these personnel should make up a fair representation of the main “actors” in the areas being investigated.

In the final analysis, ten people were chosen to participate in the validation process. These were chosen from the twenty-eight participants in the study interviews, and who were also willing to take part in the validation. A one-page structured questionnaire was sent to them, and addressed key areas.

1. To comment on the extent to which the framework has captured the key challenges which affect educated females' participation in the labour market;
2. To comment on the relation between the framework and the reality of the issues they currently perceive;
3. To comment on the extent to which the framework is of use to policy makers, employers and those who champion the cause of unemployed educated females in Saudi Arabia;
4. To identify the limitations of the framework; and
5. To advise on possible improvements to the framework.

The ten respondents (Table 8.1) were asked to rank the statements on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being Very Good, 4 = Good, 3 = Fair, 2 = Poor, and 1 being very poor on three of the five areas (as above). The results are presented below.

**Table 8.1. List of Participants for the Structured Questionnaire – Validation of the Conceptual Framework.**

Participants	Position	Place of Work	Gender
1	Head of HR Business Partnership	Company B	Female
2	Vice president of employment service	Company B	Male
3	HR Manager	Company B	Male
4	Head of personnel	Company B	Male
5	Career Counsellor	Company A	Female
6	HR Analyst	Company A	Female
7	HR Analyst	Company A	Female
8	Head of Resourcing	Company C	Male
9	HR Officer	Company C	Female
10	General Manager- for Ladies' Training and Recruitment	Council of Saudi Chambers - Asr Al-Areeba	Female

Participants were also asked to identify any limitations of the framework; and also advise on possible improvements to the framework. In general, the participants consulted judged the framework to be very clear, succinct, unambiguous and reflective of the key challenges. In all areas, the participants felt that the framework was either very good or good (Table 8.2).

**Table 8.2: Feedback from ten participants for the validation of the Conceptual Framework**

Feedback Variables	Rating				
	5	4	3	2	1
The framework has captured the very key challenges	9	1	0	0	0
The extent to which the framework takes account of and the reality, and reflects the issues currently faced	9	1	0	0	0
The potential usefulness of the framework to policy makers, employers and those who champion the cause of unemployed educated females in Saudi Arabia	8	2	0	0	0

In terms of limitations of the framework, one participant observed that it was not possible to ascertain which of the six key areas of challenge was of greatest concern. Whilst this was an interesting comment and observation, in actuality, each of the challenges could be said to be of greatest concern in different circumstances and for different stakeholders. In terms of improvement, the only comment offered was that it would be useful to develop the framework for different types of organisations (local firms, multinational firms, public, private, large and small firms). Again, whilst this is an interesting observation and comment, the thrust of the framework was not questioned. Indeed, the emphasis placed on each of the six challenging areas is likely to be different for different typologies of organisations. There is, however, ample scope for this particular comment and observation raised to be taken forward as recommendation for further studies.

Given the overwhelming “vote of confidence” in the framework, it was felt that it did not warrant any changes given the comments and observations received from the participants.

#### **8.4.3 Summary of conceptual framework.**

This section has presented a conceptual framework of the key challenging factors which affect educated women’s level of participation in the labour market in Saudi Arabia. The six main challenge factors were obtained through a thorough review of literature as well as the views gleaned from the analysis of the primary data sets obtained from both the questionnaire survey and the semi-structured interviews undertaken as part of the study. The framework was validated amongst 10 selected participants with experience of the labour market of educated females in Saudi Arabia. A vote of confidence was given to the developed framework indicating, inter alia, that the developed framework captured the key challenges, and that the framework is likely to be informative and useful to policy makers, employers and those who champion the cause of unemployed educated females in Saudi Arabia.

While the thesis has presented some insightful findings, and draws conclusion which have some obvious theoretical and policy implications for the labour market situation of Saudi female graduates and whether flexible employment alternatives provide feasible and credible solutions, a number of caveats which could be the focus of future studies are acknowledged. First, although the study provides extensive examination of the underlying factors and antecedents which define the Saudi Arabian labour market and assesses actors' conceptualisations of what constitutes flexible employment alternatives and the consequences of such alternatives with respect to the labour market problems of women and especially female graduates, the study also seems to privilege preconceived views about the social and cultural norms of Saudi Arabia as the dominant external isomorphic pull which defines the labour market and therefore has greater implications for the employment problems of Saudi females. Yet the findings also indicate that the situation is much more complex, and perhaps a more holistic explanation would require that future studies begin with more balanced presumptions, including the implications of the contradictory forces of globalisation on one hand and unique, entrenched and more socially embedded social norms on the other.

Having said that however, a second limitation concerns the relative absence of the voices of those who would claim to be the custodians of the institutions which sanction issues such as gender separation and confinement of women to the less attractive aspects of the labour market. Accordingly, future research should also seek and incorporate views regarding these dimensions and elements of Saudi Arabia.

A third limitation is the fact that although the thesis includes an extensive international comparative review of labour market changes in the past three decades, as well as a comparative analysis of indigenisation policies across different regions and countries, the study is relatively lacking in presentation and analysis of research findings in relation to

how Saudi Arabia compares with other different or, especially, similar sociocultural and economic contexts. Such an effort would be useful in terms of making a determination about the uniqueness or otherwise of how the phenomena of investigation manifest themselves in the Saudi Arabian context.

Methodology-wise, the study also suffers from the generic constraints associated with both quantitative and qualitative designs. In this regard, in addition to general and persistently highlighted limitations such as lack of depth and access to the meanings, which form the antecedents for responses (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Harteley, 2004), the specific limitations of SurveyMonkey as a data collection instrument were raised in Chapter Five. In that respect, the constraints associated with the lack of access to the requested technology (Murthy, 2013) have the potential consequence of limiting access to sources which may otherwise hold valuable information. Similarly, because the problem of biases, which are associated with qualitative methods like interviews, cannot always be overcome, there may be potential contamination of findings and outcomes. Crucially, because the research was conducted in only one country, despite the extensive exploration of comparative regional and country literature, findings may not necessarily be generalizable to other, even similar, social and economic context.

Despite these limitations, the study has produced some useful insights, which could provide a basis for future studies not only in Saudi Arabia, but also other contexts and especially for GCCCs, which have similar social contexts and have adopted similar labour market policies to address similar phenomena.

Such future studies may use quantitative statistical analysis to test for external validity and generalizability of the findings and conclusions of this study.



## **Reflection on Research Experience**

Other than the obvious goal of writing a doctoral thesis and achieving the academic accreditation which comes with it, and a keen interest in HRM as an academic discipline, as pointed out earlier in Chapter One and elsewhere in the thesis, the motivation for conducting this study is based on what Hammersley and Atkinson (1987 in Bell, 2010) call pre-understanding of the Saudi context, but particularly, tacit knowledge of some of the issues of inquiry. As Saudi Arabia invests heavily in education and as more and more Saudi women attain higher levels of Western educational qualifications and exposure to the social norms of the West, the author is motivated by curiosity as to how the Kingdom, in light of its social and cultural norms in relation to gender relations, will cope with the increasing number of highly qualified unemployed women.

Working on a Master's dissertation and contemplated the idea of further postgraduate work, the researcher realised that while there is a significant body of extant and emerging literature on gender relations and female education in Saudi Arabia, there is also a paucity of curiosity about the potential labour market problems which might arise with the flow of large numbers of highly qualified women who may not view high educational attainment as an end in itself, but instead as a means of labour market access and participation on equal terms with their male counterparts.

The investigator must admit however, that despite a fairly clear idea of an area of interest and some initial exploration of existing theory, my initial forays into a doctoral programme were very challenging, largely due to self-doubt, but also initial encounters with potential supervisors. As the project progressed, with encouragement from family, friends, but especially his supervisor, he began to find relative enjoyment in the challenge, but also found solace in the belief that he may not be the first or last PhD student to be beset with self-doubts about my capacity to see through such an intellectual undertaking.

As the researcher explored the literature and undertook research training, his interest and confidence developed, knowing that he has the potential to make a valuable contribution, if not theoretically then policy wise.

The data collection exercise was particularly challenging and sometimes extremely frustrating, but also often rewarding in ways which were not always directly relevant to the study. In that regard, some of the stories of the respondents gave me some unique insights into hitherto unfamiliar aspects of the Saudi experience. It also gave me some insight into the dynamics of the relationship between different labour market actors and participants. Consequently, upon reflection, the research has given me significant and critical insight into certain normative paradigms, policy positions and taken-for-granted phenomena about gender relations, which can only be achieved and appreciated through the prism of the curiosity and relative detachment of an academic researcher.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1: RESEARCH PERMISSION

 UNIVERSITY OF  
**WOLVERHAMPTON**  
KNOWLEDGE • INNOVATION • ENTERPRISE

Business School

Dean:  
**Dr Anthea Gregory**  
Business School  
University of Wolverhampton  
MN Building  
Nursery Street  
City Campus North  
Wolverhampton WV1 1AD  
United Kingdom

T: +44 (0) 1902 321000 or 323877 (Direct Line)  
F: +44 (0) 1902 321701  
E: A.Gregory@wlv.ac.uk

**To whom it may concern**

**Re: Abdulaziz ALFALLIH**

I am the main supervisor for his PhD and I can confirm that I have discussed and approved the fieldwork schedule with Abdulaziz Alfalih. All aspects of the research methods and empirical studies have been agreed as part of his research for his PhD at Wolverhampton University Business School.

Abdulaziz has now met all the requirements necessary to progress to the empirical aspects of his study, including; satisfactory progression report and ethical approval, which the University requires before any empirical research can be undertaken. This aspect of the project will require Abdulaziz to conduct fieldwork in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in accordance with the attached schedule.

As lead supervisor, I would be grateful if the relevant authority could kindly offer him the necessary support and assistance to proceed with this very important aspect of his studies.



Professor Roger Seifert BA(Oxford) MSc (Econ) PhD (London School of Economics)  
Professor of Human Resource Management and Industrial Relations



Dear Sir/Madam

**Research Title: Labour Flexibility:  
An analysis of the future trajectory of the employment of female graduates in Saudi Arabia**

My name is Abdulaziz Alfalih. I am a PhD research student in Human Resource Management (HRM), Wolverhampton University, United Kingdom. I am currently carrying on my research project by focusing on the potential of flexible policies and employment for female graduates in Saudi Arabia.

The main method of gathering primary data will be questionnaire and interviews. You are being invited to consider taking part in the research study on “flexible policies and employment for female Saudi graduates”, which is being undertaken solely by me under the supervision of Professor Roger Seifert, Professor of HRM and Industrial Relations in Management Research Centre at Wolverhampton Business School. You are being invited to complete a questionnaire because as an employee of the company you are better placed to understand labour issues which are the concerns of this study. Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully and discuss it with your immediate line manager and the head of HRM in your organisation if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information.

I can assure you that your participation involves no risks that I am aware of and I hope the questionnaire will give you the benefit of an opportunity to express and discuss your views about the specific and general aspects of labour relations in your company and in Saudi Arabia in general. You are free to decide whether you wish to take part or not. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time and without giving reasons. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire comprising of questions about the labour practices in your company in relation to the treatment of female employees which should take you no more than forty minutes to complete. You are free to refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer and you can withdraw your participation at any stage of the process. Completion and return of the questionnaire will be construed as consent to participate in the research.

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should speak to me and I will do my best to answer your questions. My contact details are:

Abdulaziz Alfalih

Room ML 120, ML Building, Wolverhampton Business School, City Campus (North)

Nursery Street

Wolverhampton

WV1 1AD

Email: [aziz-al-faleh@hotmail.com](mailto:aziz-al-faleh@hotmail.com)

**Labour Flexibility:**  
**An analysis of the future trajectory of the employment of female graduates in Saudi Arabia**

This questionnaire will form part of a PhD research project into how flexibility in employment practices can increase the number of female graduates entering the Saudi labour market.

Your co-operation in participating in this questionnaire is greatly appreciated, and I would ask you to be as honest as possible in responding: please be assured that all responses will be treated in the strictest confidence.

This questionnaire is designed specifically for female graduates either currently in the Saudi Labour market, or hoping to enter the labour market.

**SECTION ONE – Demographic and general Information**

**1. Name of the company**

Company A ☐

Company B Bank ☐

Company C ☐

Local  
Government ☐

Unemployed ☐

**2. Please indicate which age range you fall into:**

18-24 ☐ 25-34 ☐ 35-44 ☐ 45-60 ☐

**3. Please indicate whether you achieved your qualifications in Saudi Arabia or abroad:**

Graduated in Saudi Arabia ☐

Graduated abroad ☐

**4. Please indicate your study and qualification area:**

- Engineering ☐
- Health /Medicine ☐
- Education ☐
- Languages ☐
- Business studies ☐
- Marketing ☐
- Human Resources ☐
- Creative Arts/Media ☐
- IT ☐
- Law ☐
- Other ☐

**5. Please indicate your level of degree/Education**

- High school ☐
- Diploma ☐
- Bachelor ☐
- Master ☐
- PHD ☐

**6. If you are currently employed/If you have been working in the past, please indicate whether you work for:**

- A Saudi Firm ☐
- A foreign multi-national ☐

**7. Also please indicate whether you work:**

- Part-time/shifts ☐
- Full time ☐
- Flexible working pattern ☐

8. Please indicate the period of time it took you to find employment/you have been looking for a job:

- |                            |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| One month or less          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Two to three months        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Four to six months         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Seven to twelve months     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Twelve months to two Years | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Three to five years        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Five to seven years        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Seven to nine years        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Nine years or more         | <input type="checkbox"/> |

9. Please indicate the number of applications you submitted in total

- |                            |                      |
|----------------------------|----------------------|
| To Saudi firms             | <input type="text"/> |
| To private Saudi firms     | <input type="text"/> |
| To foreign multi-nationals | <input type="text"/> |

**Perspectives on the labour market for females in Saudi Arabia For the following statements  
please indicate whether you:**

- Disagree strongly**  
**Disagree slightly**  
**Neither agree nor disagree**  
**Agree slightly**  
**Agree strongly**

10. It is much harder for females in my industry to gain employment with Saudi firms than it is for males.

- |                            |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Disagree strongly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Disagree slightly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither agree nor disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree slightly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree strongly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**11.** Foreign multi-nationals are more likely to hire Saudi female graduates than Saudi firms.

- |                            |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Disagree strongly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Disagree slightly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither agree nor disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree slightly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree strongly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**12.** I have faced prejudice from male workers in my field since starting /looking for employment.

- |                            |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Disagree strongly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Disagree slightly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither agree nor disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree slightly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree strongly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**13** I believe firms should offer part-time work to female graduates to make use of our skills.

- |                            |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Disagree strongly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Disagree slightly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither agree nor disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree slightly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree strongly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**14.** I believe that whilst the government is committed to educating females in Saudi Arabia, organisations in the country are less committed to employing us.

- |                            |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Disagree strongly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Disagree slightly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither agree nor disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree slightly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree strongly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**15** I would appreciate being offered more flexible working patterns (annualised hours, flexi-time, job sharing or similar approaches).

- |                            |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Disagree strongly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Disagree slightly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither agree nor disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree slightly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree strongly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**16.** I think that female graduates can make a major contribution to the economy and development of Saudi Arabia.

- |                            |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Disagree strongly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Disagree slightly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither agree nor disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree slightly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree strongly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |



**17.** I believe female graduates in Saudi Arabia receive the same levels of training as males once employed.

- |                            |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Disagree strongly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Disagree slightly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither agree nor disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree slightly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree strongly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**18.** I believe female graduates are paid on a level with their male counterparts in Saudi Arabia.

- |                            |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Disagree strongly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Disagree slightly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither agree nor disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree slightly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree strongly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**19.** I believe that the religious situation in Saudi Arabia has an adverse effect on females entering the job market in certain sectors.

- |                            |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Disagree strongly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Disagree slightly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither agree nor disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree slightly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree strongly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**20.** I believe the government in Saudi Arabia is highly committed to increasing the participation of female graduates in the country.

- |                            |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Disagree strongly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Disagree slightly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither agree nor disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree slightly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree strongly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**21.** I am concerned that female graduates who cannot quickly find work will choose not to enter the labour market in Saudi Arabia and their skills will be lost.

- |                            |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Disagree strongly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Disagree slightly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither agree nor disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree slightly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree strongly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**22.** I think temporary agencies / short term contracts are an effective way to enter the labour market.

- |                            |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Disagree strongly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Disagree slightly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither agree nor disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree slightly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree strongly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**23.** I think more firms in Saudi Arabia should consider offering flexible working patterns to female graduates to encourage us to enter and remain in the labour market.

- |                            |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Disagree strongly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Disagree slightly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither agree nor disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree slightly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree strongly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**24.** I would prefer to gain employment with a foreign multi-national rather than a Saudi or state-owned organisation.

- |                            |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Disagree strongly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Disagree slightly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither agree nor disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree slightly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree strongly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**25.** Prior to gaining my current position, I signed on with temporary agencies to find short-term work rather than be unemployed.

- |                            |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Disagree strongly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Disagree slightly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither agree nor disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree slightly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree strongly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**26.** I applied for jobs outside my graduate study area so that I could enter the labour market.

- |                            |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Disagree strongly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Disagree slightly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither agree nor disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree slightly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree strongly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**27.** I have confidence that now I am in the labour market, I will remain employed.

- |                            |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Disagree strongly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Disagree slightly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither agree nor disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree slightly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree strongly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**28.** I believe the government needs to do more to encourage firms to find ways to employ female graduates.

- |                            |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Disagree strongly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Disagree slightly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither agree nor disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree slightly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree strongly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**29.** If I had known the difficulties I would face gaining entry to the employment market I would not have undertaken my studies.

- |                            |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Disagree strongly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Disagree slightly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither agree nor disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree slightly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree strongly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**30.** I would greatly welcome improved initiatives for flexible working, both from the government and from employing organisations.

- |                            |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Disagree strongly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Disagree slightly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither agree nor disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree slightly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree strongly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**31.** I think that the education system, led by the Ministry of Education, should do more to inform female graduates and prospective graduates of the way that more flexible working practices can aid them in entering the labour market.

- |                            |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Disagree strongly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Disagree slightly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither agree nor disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree slightly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree strongly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**32.** I think that the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education should collaborate on developing policies to encourage firms to adopt more flexible working practices so that the skills of female graduates can be used in the market place and boost the economy of the country.

- |                            |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Disagree strongly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Disagree slightly          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither agree nor disagree | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree slightly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agree strongly             | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**33.** Public private sector participants

- |         |                          |
|---------|--------------------------|
| Public  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Private | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Thank you for your time in answering these questions. If you have any other comments you wish to make about the labour market for female graduates in Saudi Arabia, please make them below.

.....

.....

.....

.....

**Thank you for your time in completing this questionnaire**

Dear Sir/Madam

**Research Title: Labour Flexibility: An analysis of the future trajectory of the employment of female graduates in Saudi Arabia**

My name is Abdulaziz Alfalih and I am a PhD research student in Human Resource Management (HRM) at Wolverhampton University, in the United Kingdom. I am currently carrying on my research project by focusing on the potential of flexible policies and employment for female graduates in Saudi Arabia.

The main method of gathering primary data will be questionnaire and interviews. You are being invited to consider taking part in the research study on “flexible policies and employment for female Saudi graduates”, which is being undertaken solely by myself under the supervision of Professor Roger Seifert, Professor of HRM and Industrial Relations in the Management Research Centre at Wolverhampton Business School.

You are being invited to take part in an interview as a member of the senior management, because as an employee of the company you are well placed to understand the labour issues which are the concerns of this study, as well as other HRM employment issues in your enterprise. Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully and discuss it with your immediate line manager and the head of HR in your organisation if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information.

I can assure you that your participation involves no risks that I am aware of and I hope the interview will give you the benefit of an opportunity to express and discuss your views about specific and general issues relating to your organisation’s HRM strategies and practices. You are free to decide whether you wish to take part or not. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign two consent forms: one is for you to keep and the other is for our records. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time and without giving reasons. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in an interview of no more than 45 minutes. The interview will involve about 15 questions, and will relate to your personal employment profile, your organisation, and flexibility in employment practices for female graduates within the Saudi labour market. Your permission will be sought to record the interview in a manner that is agreeable to you. You are free to refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer and you can withdraw your participation at any stage of the process.

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should speak to me and I will do my best to answer your questions. My contact details are:

Abdulaziz Alfalih  
Room ML 120, ML Building, Wolverhampton Business School, City Campus (North) Nursery Street, Wolverhampton, WV1 1AD  
Email: Aziz-al-faleh@hotmail.com

# CONSENT FORM

**Research Title: Labour flexibility: an analysis of the future trajectory of the employment of female graduates in Saudi Arabia**

Name and contact details of Principal Investigator:

Abdulaziz Alfalih

Room ML 120, ML Building, Wolverhampton Business School, City Campus (North)  
Nursery Street

Wolverhampton

WV1 1AD

Email: Aziz-al-faleh@hotmail.com

**Please tick the box if you agree with the statement**

Please indicate how quotes for this research might be used (tick one):

I am happy for any quotes to be used anonymously ☐

I do not want any quotes to be used ☐

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

**Research Title: Labour Flexibility: An analysis of the future trajectory of the employment of female graduates in Saudi Arabia**

I am a PhD research student in Human Resource Management (HRM) currently researching into the potential of flexible policies and employment for female graduates in Saudi Arabia as part of the requirements of the PhD programme.

A brief statement on the background, aim and objectives of the research is in the following page. The main method of gathering primary data will be questionnaire and interviews. You are invited to take part in this research (interview) because you as a senior/ a head manager /Director/ in this company, you are well placed to understand the future trajectory of the employment of female graduates in Saudi Arabia issues which are the concerns of this study.

The interview will involve about 17 questions and will take no more than 45 minutes to complete. Please find attached the interview questions. You are assured that your participation involves no risks that I am aware of. All answers provided will be confidential and personal or company details will be anonymised.

Thank you for your participation in advance.

Kind regards,  
Abdulaziz Al faleh

**Labour Flexibility:**  
**An analysis of the future trajectory of the employment of female graduates in Saudi Arabia**

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for my PhD study. The research looks at flexibility in employment practices for female graduates within the Saudi Arabian labour market. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated. I would ask you to be as honest as possible and be assured that all your responses will be treated in the strictest confidence, and no identifying information will be published.

1. Personal Details
  - a. Age:
  - b. Educational Background:
  - c. Place of education:
  - d. Position:
  - e. Any other relevant information:
2. Can you tell me what your understanding is of the labour market situation in Saudi Arabia?
3. Can you tell me the percentage ratio of foreign to Saudi nationals that you have working within your organisation?
4. With regard to the Saudi nationals employed by your organisation, can you tell me what percentage of these are female graduates? This includes those who achieved qualifications abroad and in Saudi Arabia.
5. What is your organisation's view on the employment of female graduates within the country?
6. Do you know what percentage of applicants for jobs within your post are female graduates?
7. Are you aware of the Saudi government's views and policies in regard to tackling employment within Saudi Arabia in general and in relation to increasing female graduate employment particularly? What are your views on this: do you think the government needs more or less involvement in this area?
8. What is your organization's understanding of the term "flexible employment"?
9. Does your organisation have any specific policies and options related to encouraging flexible employment for its workforce, both male and female? Can you tell me what these are and how you communicate this in both your internal communications and in recruitment advertising?
10. Do you utilise temporary agencies to recruit staff on a short term basis? If so, what percentage of the staff who start in this way are subsequently given full time employment?
11. Do you find using employment agencies a useful and flexible approach to encouraging individuals into the labour market?

**12.** Does your organisation operate any of the following flexible employment practices? For each of the options that you offer can you tell me how this works for you as an organisation in terms of motivation and encouragement of particularly female graduates to join your organisation? If your organisation does not offer any of the following flexible employment practices, Could you explain the reason(s)? Please

- a)** Annualised hours where the employee commits to work a certain number of hours per year but these are spread across core hours and can be fitted around the demands of the business or the employee's commitments?
- b)** Flexi-time, where the employee works a certain number of core hours during the day but their start and finish time can be flexible?
- c)** Compressed hours, where the employee works longer daily hours than their co-workers but works a shorter week than other staff?
- d)** Part-time hours – working only a few days a week?
- e)** Working from home?
- f)** Job sharing, where two or more individuals work a certain number of hours with the total hours making up a full time equivalent?

**13.** If you do not offer any of these options at present, do you think that there could be a future benefit to you from including these in your employment options and would they encourage more female graduates to join your organisation?

**14.** Do you believe that increasing flexible employment options will aid you as an organisation? In particular do you think you will be able to increase the number of female graduates who are likely to apply for roles that you have available?

**15.** How valuable a contribution do you think that female graduates can make to your organisation? Can you explain why you feel this way?

**16.** Would your organisation consider increasing the options for flexible employment if it meant higher productivity and reduced turnover of staff?

**17.** Does your organisation consider that flexible employment practices may be a valid solution for reducing unemployment levels for Saudi nationals, particularly female graduates

**18.** Is there anything you would like to add?

**Thank you, those are all the questions I have for you, but if there is anything else you would like to share in relation to your own experience of entering the Saudi employment market as a graduate, I would be very happy to include this information.**

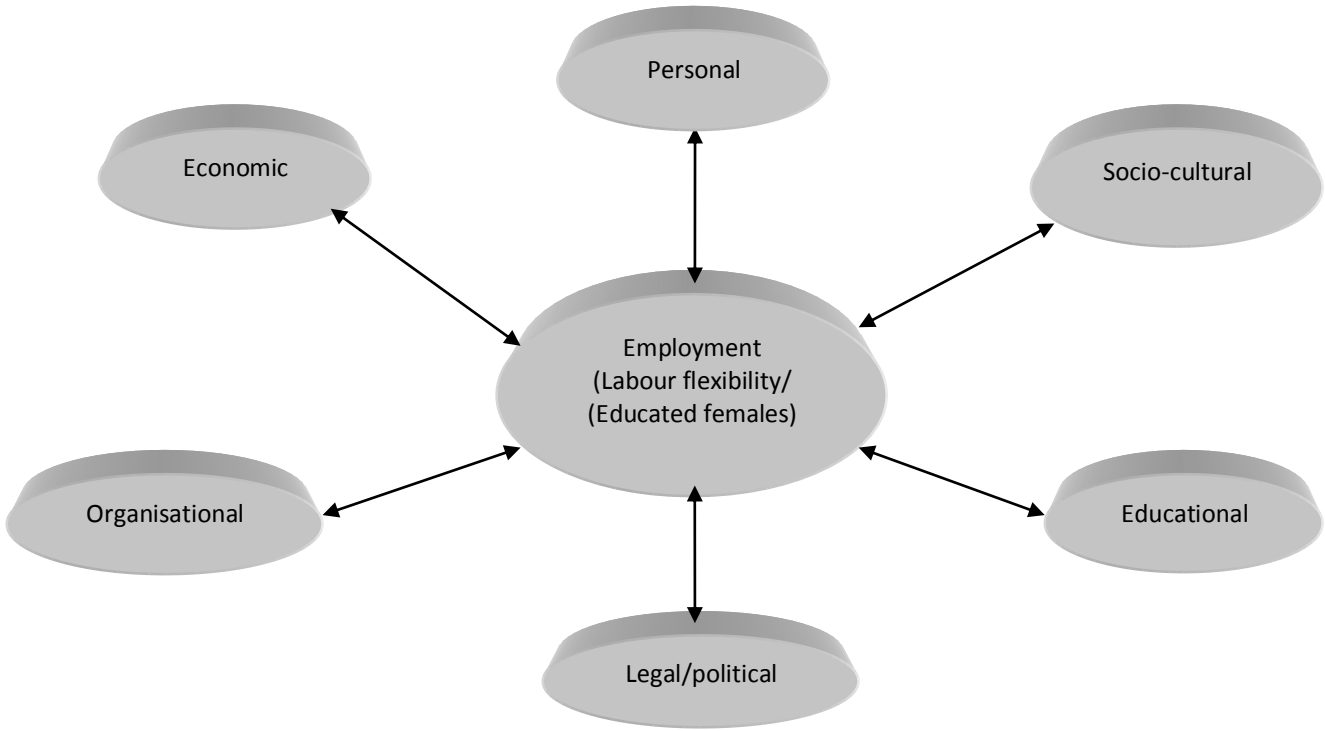
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**Labour Flexibility: An analysis of the future trajectory of the employment of female graduates in Saudi Arabia**

Thank you for agreeing to provide feedback on my framework. As explained during the interview, the research looks at flexibility in employment practices for female graduates within the Saudi Arabian labour market. I have developed the framework below, and I would like your opinion to validate it. I would ask you to be as honest as possible and be assured that all your responses will be treated in the strictest confidence, and that no identifying information will be published.

Challenging factors affecting educated women’s level of participation in the labour market in Saudi Arabia



## Personal Details

- a. Age:
- b. Educational background:
- c. Place of education:
- d. Position:
- e. Any other relevant information:

## Evaluation of the proposed framework:

**Part A:** *Using a scaling system 1 to 5, where 1 is very poor and 5 is Very Good, please select the response that is most representative of how the framework addresses each statement, and justify this:*

1. How well did the framework capture the key challenges which affect educated females' participation in the labour market?  
Very poor ☐ Poor ☐ Fair ☐ Good ☐ Very good ☐
2. How close is the relation between the framework and the reality of the issues you currently perceive?  
Very poor ☐ Poor ☐ Fair ☐ Good ☐ Very good ☐
3. To what extent is the framework of use to policy makers, employers and those who champion the cause of unemployed educated females in Saudi Arabia?  
Very poor ☐ Poor ☐ Fair ☐ Good ☐ Very good ☐

## Part B: Reflection

4. Do you have any suggestions or comments for further improvements needed to the framework?
5. Would you recommend that policy makers take into consideration this framework in the implementation of new labour policies?